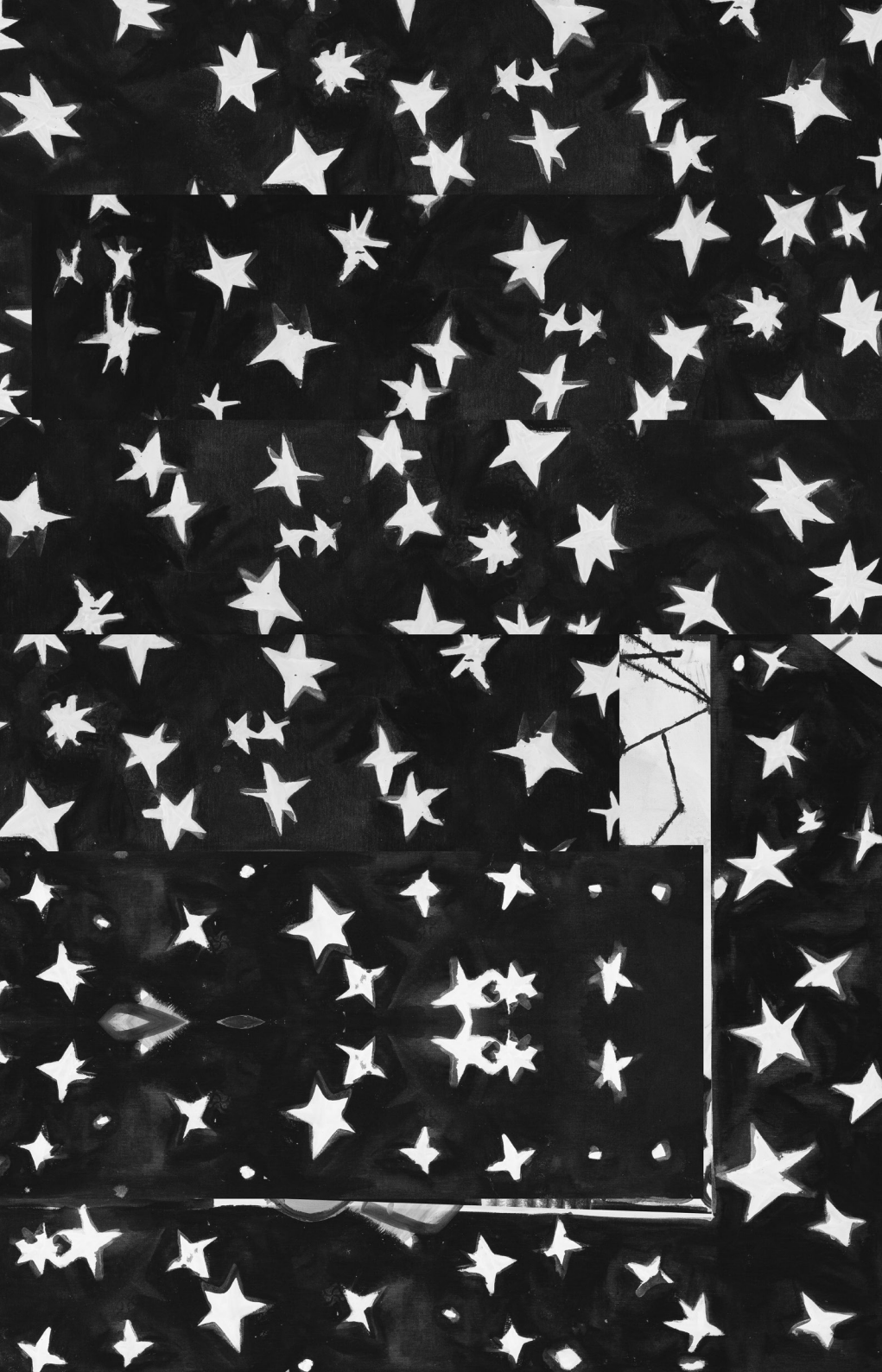




Tobias Pils. Shh

September 27, 2025 to April 12, 2026

Curated by Manuela Ammer

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Exhibition tour
with Tobias Pils and Manuela Ammer

Atrium

Manuela Ammer: Tobias, even before entering the exhibition space we encounter a new work of yours in the museum foyer. It's a projection that includes various elements from your paintings and is projected onto the *Weisser Kubus* (White Cube) by Austrian artist Heimo Zobernig, which connects the two halves of the building separated by the lightwell. Can you tell us a bit about this?

Tobias Pils: The idea was to evoke a certain sense of anticipation or a particular vibe before you even see a painting. Like a mist, or a cloud that produces a specific temperature and sound. Sun, moon, and stars. The first projection features a montage of a starry sky, which prompts the viewer to consider what might lie beyond. In the second projection, we take a look beyond the firmament and see streaks, particles—something distant, but at the same time near. The projection also responds to the physical cube itself, which Ferdinand Schmatz described as a “refrigerator” in the exhibition catalogue: I superimpose my ‘cloud’ onto this rigid geometric shape in an attempt to dissolve it. So, right from the very outset, it's all about the relationship between surface and space—and also about one of the key themes in my artwork: ambivalence.

Level 0

MA: As we make our way into the exhibition, I have an opening question for you, Tobias: Can you tell us a bit about your career trajectory as an artist? These days you work mainly as a painter, but you also have a special affinity for drawing ...

TP: My father studied at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna under Josef Mikl and would take me and my brother there with him as kids. I was immediately captivated by the atmosphere. When I was seventeen, I started drawing every day and then applied to the academy. Up until 2005, I exclusively made drawings: at first, small ink drawings, and then later, large-scale pencil drawings. In my mid-thirties, the constraints of drawing became too much for me, so I bought myself a canvas and some paint brushes. But it took a few years before I was able to find my own voice in the medium of painting.

MA: This exhibition at mumok is the most comprehensive presentation of your work to date and is being shown across multiple spaces of the museum. How is the exhibition structured? Which aspects of your artistic practice are being united here for the first time?

TP: The exhibition isn't a retrospective; it's more of a preview. We're looking at the last ten years of my practice as a kind of arc, or a movement. The exhibition spaces are organized in such a way that you never see everything all at once. The lines of sight are continually generating new connections and points of dialogue between the images. On the floor where the exhibition entrance is, you can see my most recent artworks, and then on the second basement level, you can see artworks that I made between 2014 and 2022. There's also a smaller side room on that level with a large-scale wall painting, and opposite it, a series of small pencil drawings—they form a kind of alphabet. There's also a glimpse into my

artistic origins, with a group of drawings I made in 1993 in collaboration with the Austrian writer Friederike Mayröcker.

MA: The title of the exhibition is special, too, not least because it's so short. Could you tell us something about the title, *Shh*, which isn't actually a word per se, but a sound we make to ask people to be silent.

TP: We were trying to find a title that had some element of universality; a sound that would prompt you to pause and reflect, but that would also bridge the divide between waking and sleep—a moment of transformation.

MA: Those who have been familiar with your practice for some time tend to associate your artwork with a highly pared-back color palette consisting of shades of black and white. But when you set foot onto the ground floor of the mumok building, everything looks pretty colorful ...

TP: I've always felt that color was present in my practice. Present in its absence. When I was making these newer, more colorful images, color was just as present in my mind as it was when I made the black-and-white or gray paintings. I worked within the black-and-white spectrum for so long because I came from a drawing background and regarded the limitation as a kind of freedom. New doors kept opening up. The color thing actually happened by accident. One day, I bought the wrong tubes of paint—blue instead of gray. So, the color just kind of crept in, like something emanating from within. Bice Curiger coins a beautiful visual metaphor for this in the catalogue: she likens it to the blushing of human skin.

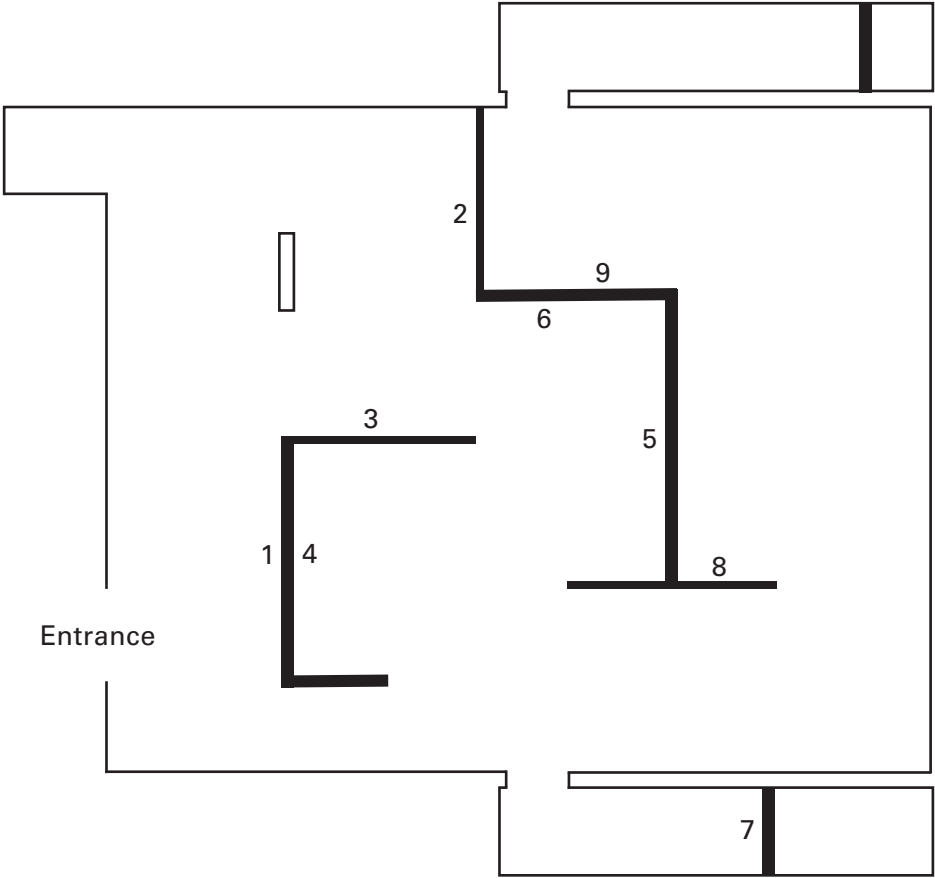
1 MA: The first painting in the exhibition, which is visible from the atrium through the glass window, is titled *Blindensturz* and was created last year. You've modeled it on a very well-known work by the Dutch artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder, his 1568 painting of a group of six blind beggars. What attracted you to this particular motif? Do you often reference motifs from art history in your work?

TP: *Blindensturz* is an exception, even though, whenever you paint, you always find yourself in a shared space with other painters. But this painting by Bruegel is certainly a pivotal image for me, and one that has stuck with me since childhood. When I was a kid, we had a book about Bruegel at home, which my brother and I would leaf through for hours on end. This particular image stuck with me, and I felt the urge to paint it. How would it feel to paint this picture? That was what interested me. And if I were going to do it, then it would have to be on a big scale! While I was painting, it became clear to me that it should be more of an echo than a reproduction, and I decided to leave the painting in its preliminary state. The fact that the canvas is mostly empty, that the entire background—the landscape, the church, the river—is absent, also made sense to me thematically. Blind people can't see any of this stuff, after all. So, the painting is more about conveying a feeling: what is it like to be touched or held by someone, or when a person falls? How is energy transferred from one person to the next?

MA: I'd like to add one more thing about the painting, because it touches on a theme that plays a role in several of your artworks. This relationship that you mentioned between eye and hand is of fundamental importance in the practice of painting. It also speaks to something akin to "internal images," however corny that may sound.

TP: All of us have memories; we all dream. That means there are images that come from inside us, but we don't have to define that as "interiority," per se.

Level 0



2 MA: Not far from where *Blindensturz* is hanging, there's a triptych, or a painting in three parts, that you've titled *Happy Days*. It depicts bodies that are turning towards or away from each other. A woman with long hair appears in the painting several times, and also in the paintings that you produced at the same time under the title *Us*. What was on your mind when you created these pictures?

TP: This triptych is about how we, as humans, grapple with internal and external madness—it's a grotesque in the vein of Samuel Beckett; the title is also a reference to one of his plays. So, it's about a psychological state that also emanates into the background. A kind of whirring or shimmering.

MA: You mean the way you painted the backgrounds, using dabs and smears ... Why did you opt for the triptych format?

TP: Because it allows me to think in broader arcs in terms of content and form and to break an artwork up into multiple sequences. I always find that the first painting gives rise to the second, and then those two combined give rise to the third. This creates a fixed order.

MA: But you've also made other series of paintings in which the individual paintings can be arranged in different orders—with a triptych, the order is fixed.

TP: Yes, but there is no *one central painting*—I mean, in the sense of one being more important than the others—which is generally the case with classical triptychs. I consider all three parts to be equal. That said, there's always something akin to a resolution or even redemption that comes through in the very last image. In this case, it's the female figure who's washing her hair, while a kind of miniature version of her is lovingly touching her foot. As if she were making peace with herself.

MA: Many of your paintings—including the triptych—are produced in groups, which you also refer to as “families,” which is quite a specific designation. Normally, we’d refer to paintings as a group, series, or sequence. Why do you use the term “family” when talking about your paintings?

TP: I’ve never really felt that the concept of a “series” was applicable to my work because I’m always moving from one image to the next and see each image as an individual in its own right—just like a person. In a given time period, I’ll create a group of paintings that somehow belong together, even though they’re all distinct pieces. Like a family unit, with fathers, siblings, maybe even twins. Obviously, I’m not referring to the concept of family in the traditional sense, but rather the idea of belonging.

MA: The weird uncle and the crazy aunt ...

TP: And the baby. But then at some point, I’ll create a painting that doesn’t belong in the family. And that’s when something new begins.

- 3 MA: Not far from *Happy Days* hangs a painting titled *Me*. It depicts a childlike figure with a moon-shaped face, which we encounter again later on in the exhibition. This figure has its eyes closed and appears to be imagining something or dreaming about something—perhaps the other figures with whom it shares the canvas. Is this *Me* a childlike version of Tobias Pils?

TP: Yeah, a childlike version of me. Close your eyes and meet ‘little Tobi.’ The challenge of disentangling. But also, it’s a moment of pause, feeling your core energy. Making contact with your inner self. There’s another self-portrait in the exhibition, too, on the second basement level. In it, a larger figure holds a smaller version of itself in its hands, similar to the little echo that touches the woman’s heel.

4 MA: In the same year that you created *Happy Days*, you also produced paintings that evoke an entirely different mood. The bodies depicted in these pictures barely fill the blank canvas. They look emaciated, they're wearing prosthetics, their bones are exposed. If you look very closely, you can see hints of some sort of manual treatment that would appear to be rather painful ...

TP: I made these paintings before I created the triptych and the *Us* paintings. In the fall of 2022, I had a bicycle accident, and I broke my right shoulder. For months, I could barely even move my right arm and of course I was unable to paint. But at some point, I got fed up with the whole thing and decided to try and make something out of this restriction. That's how these minimalist paintings came about: from my new, restricted range of motion. My own body felt like a stranger to me, so I wanted to incorporate something into the images that was also very far removed from me. So I wove elements from Japanese *shunga*, which are pornographic woodblock prints, into my new compositions. That's where the title *Sh* comes from. It's all about vulnerability and being helpless.

5 MA: Last year, after making these very physical paintings, you began work on a group of paintings that you titled *Geist*, in which the color green predominates. In these images, a kind of specter appears repeatedly, holding a candle; it seems to creep its way into the various compositions. In one of them, it enters the image from the right-hand side and passes across the silhouette of a recumbent human head; in a different painting, it can be seen fighting with a figure from *Blindensturz*, and in the smallest painting in the group, it appears as a white silhouette protruding upside-down into the canvas space from above. What was the idea behind these *Geist* paintings?

TP: It just happened organically, because the body also needs a consciousness. What that means in painterly terms

is a decomposition. And unlike the physical body, a spirit is not bound by the laws of gravity—it can appear from anywhere. Displacements in the bodily blueprint.

- 6 MA: In the last painting in the *Geist* group, the signature green is replaced by shades of pink and yellow. This is a kind of liminal, transitional image, isn't it? It also features two spectral forms that are clinging to each other, but they're competing with a row of candles, some of which are alight and some of which are extinguished. And then there's this curious moment in the upper left-hand corner: the outline of a window in which we can see a spotted vessel of some sort ...

TP: It is a transitional image, yeah. In order to subvert the narrative, I placed a pitcher in the window, which I added spots to, and then all of a sudden it was a beer mug. This, in turn, opened up a path into the still lifes.

- 7 MA: The spotted vessel in question does in fact reappear in the still lifes, but this time it's the centerpiece rather than a mere pictorial reference. The first still life you painted is titled *Hmm* and is exhibited alone in a separate side room. It depicts candles atop a table covered with a white tablecloth, the spotted jug, wilted roses, and two champagne glasses, one of which has toppled over and has virtually fallen out of the image. In terms of composition, it's actually fairly classical ...

TP: I wasn't interested so much in the classical aspect as the genre painting aspect. The fact that it's nothing special; that it's something that's been done a thousand times before. There's a kind of truth in that. In my version, there's this glass from Ikea, a dried-up rose that my father left behind, and these candles that I had in my studio. Just these mundane things that are kind of remnants of me. But at the same time, this mundanity, this simplicity, contains everything all at once. We've seen it a thousand times before, it's been done a thousand times before, yet somehow my painting is still something completely new.

8 MA: But then there are artworks that are a clear departure
9 from the generic still life. There's this one painting where
a candle and a glass take on monumental proportions, and
a leg protrudes into the picture from the right-hand side—
it's utterly absurd. In another painting that's reminiscent of
the last *Geist* painting, a candle turns into a figure whose leg
is stuck inside the spotted vessel. These still lifes are actually
not "still" at all; in fact, everything's moving ...

TP: Well, I wanted to take a closer look at the problem—
in particular, the relationship between motion and stillness.
That's why I literally got really close to the candle and the
glass. The objects become bodies, in a sense, and that's
where the leg comes in. As for this big, relatively colorful
still life titled *Wrong*, it unites two levels that actually have
absolutely nothing to do with each other, but that explain
quite a lot with this "anti-logic." Like an acid trip that leads
to profound insights.

Level – 2a

10 MA: The first painting on this floor is also featured on the
cover of the book that accompanies the exhibition. It's called
Untitled (Mädchen) and was created in 2015. In a way, it's also
an absurd image because it depicts a stick figure, but on a
massive scale; it essentially monumentalizes something that
we would otherwise see as trivial and insignificant. What's
more, there's a foot growing out of the figure's head, and
it's carrying an empty white surface in front of it. What
was going through your mind when you created this figure?
Why does it take on such significance here?

TP: I don't remember exactly what was going through
my mind, to be honest. I see it as a kind of wooden figurine,
as if you'd taken wooden planks and built a figure out of
them. And to bring the figure to life, I made a foot grow out

of its head. The foot's painted differently from the figure's legs, which look more like the legs of one of those old jumping jack toys. In the Mühlviertel and Waldviertel regions, where I grew up, there are these depictions of Christ and the Saints that are made out of sheet metal and are completely flat, which also interested me. *Untitled (Mädchen)* could also represent a crucifixion. Another painting of mine is titled *Jesus Is a Woman ...* Ultimately, the image is a prototype, like a clothing rack that can hold all the paintings that came before it and all the paintings that were made after it. Like a skeleton.

MA: In this painting we can also clearly see that, for many years, you didn't paint your pictures on an easel, but on the floor. The black acrylic paint you used for *Untitled (Mädchen)* was incredibly thin and runny and would have dripped down the canvas if it had been standing upright during the painting process. But instead of drips, we can see dark puddles in several parts of the canvas where the paint has soaked into the fabric. What made you start painting your artworks on the floor?

TP: Back then, I was painting on quite a large scale, and I wanted to be able to deal with my paintings in a more immediate, intimate manner. I wanted to be utterly connected, physically connected, from my head, through my whole body, right down to my feet. When you paint pictures that size on the floor, you invariably end up stepping on them. You don't really see what you're doing; you have to feel it. You lose all sense of distance and detachment. If you want to be able to look at what you've done, you have to climb up a ladder.

MA: So, you're actually on all fours when you paint ...

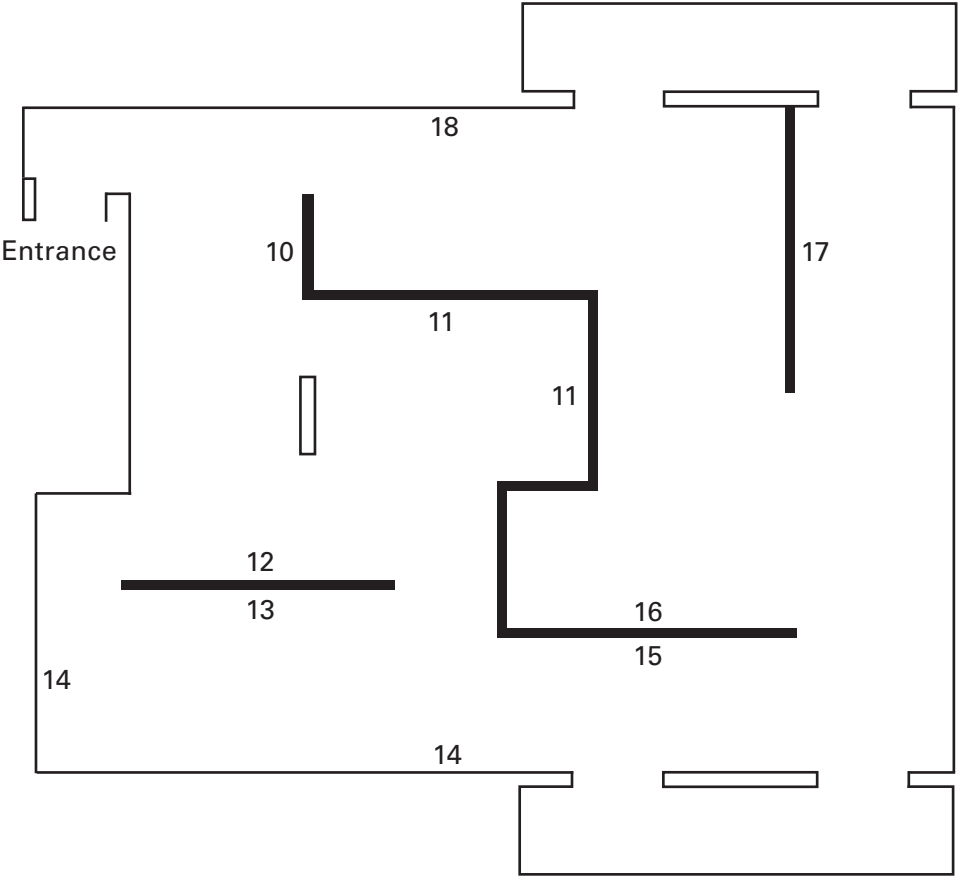
TP: Yeah, on all fours, and in some cases, you can even see footprints. And the paint also dries differently, you can work very fluidly; rivulets, streams, and pools form, it looks very different than it would if painted on the easel.

11 MA: Let's move on to the topic of spatiality. Not long after you made *Untitled (Mädchen)*, you spent several months in Marfa, Texas, in the USA. It was there that you created a group of paintings and drawings that are of great significance to you, and that deal with the vast, flat, expansive landscape you encountered there. Can you talk a little bit about these paintings, in particular how they were influenced by the landscape in which they were created?

TP: The architecture and landscape in Marfa are worlds away from what I grew up with. Everything in Marfa seemed almost two-dimensional to me—but in a good way. This sense of emptiness and flatness, but also a sense of abundance in the nothingness. You think it's desert, and then there are all these grasses, a multitude of browns. I hadn't actually planned to paint while I was there, but then when I got there, I realized I had the opportunity to paint something that I wouldn't be able to paint anywhere else. I used a very small amount of very diluted acrylic paint to create ten paintings that capture this flatness, the characteristic adobe architecture made out of clay, and the atmosphere of the desert. And that's where distinct figures began to emerge for the first time: faces, eyes, body parts. The personifications of a place.

12 MA: This exhibition also features a new wall painting
13 by you, which we will take a look at together later. But this interest in the relationship between painting and wall, or rather painting and space, is also evident in your earlier artworks, like for example 2017's *Bonner Raum*, or 2018's *Seven Days*, which are displayed here back-to-back on a wall that was built specifically for this purpose. These works in several parts have an almost sculptural or architectural quality to them—they're not just paintings on a wall ...

Level – 2a



TP: *Bonner Raum* was commissioned for Kunstmuseum Bonn. I had been assigned an exhibition space, and I wanted to cover it with an architectonic motif of a tree. This ultimately resulted in four monumental paintings that look the same at first glance, but then when you take a closer look, differences begin to emerge. Just like if you planted four real trees next to each other. They'd probably end up roughly the same height, but the fork of each branch would be slightly different. *Bonner Raum* is not about the overall composition; it's about the details.

MA: And what was on your mind when you painted *Seven Days*?

TP: With *Seven Days*, the idea was that there would be a figure playing with one of Franz West's *Passstücke* or *Adaptives*, and then it would mutate as a result. The *Adaptive* then vanishes, while the figure continues to mutate and also splits into several different personalities. Ultimately, we end up with seven different images. The idea here is: how does a person progress through their week? But then there's no specific Monday image or Tuesday image ...

MA: So that would be one of the artworks where the individual components can be arranged in any order, which is not the case for the triptychs. But *Seven Days* also brings to mind the biblical creation story ...

TP: Sure, but that's just a coincidence.

MA: It's a pretty significant coincidence, in my opinion.

TP: And I'm playing with that, of course.

MA: Well, title aside, the paintings have an element of totemic sculptures or primordial life forms about them, blending elements of the human, animal, and plant. There's no need to invoke the Christian creation myth; the paintings

do that on their own. But let's return to the *Adaptive* you briefly mentioned just now. These *Adaptives* by Franz West are portable sculptures made from plaster and papier-mâché that function like prostheses or extensions of the body. And in your case, these white geometric shapes ...

TP: What interested me was trying to imagine what a primordial state would feel like—a “what might it have been like?” But at the same time, I wanted to bring that into the present—not as an esoteric feeling, but in the artificiality and in the art. The *Adaptive* embeds the paintings in the realm of contemporary art, in the here and now. But sometimes they're just little gimmicks, like a ticket of admission into the image, which then peter out. I need them if I'm going to get the whole thing started at all.

- 14 MA: In the *Night on Earth* paintings, there's definitely a cosmological connection. The figures from the *Seven Days* paintings appear here, surrounded by suns, moons, and stars; they seem to be carrying the sky and all its celestial bodies. Imagery of the universe comes to mind here. Where are you headed with this?

TP: These paintings grapple with the unfathomableness of the night sky, this gigantic canopy that we live beneath as creatures, but also with the theories that surround it. The projection at the start of the exhibition already hints at this, but it's more clearly articulated here. Theories of endlessness, infinity, the titans who hold things up but whose heads have been cut off, and the worm-like people who live beneath. As a viewer, you're confronted with these ideas but you remain on the outside. With *Sleepers*, it's different.

- 15 MA: When you say *Sleepers*, you're referring to a group of paintings you created a few years later, but in which you revisited the motifs of the starry sky and cosmos.

TP: They're also nighttime scenes, but you're not detached from them; you're directly involved, in a state of sleep. One of the paintings shows a bunch of sleeping people lying on top of each other, and the moon isn't just a symbol; it's so close that you can even make out the details of its craters. Being asleep is also a form of exposure, helplessness, but I'm more interested in exploring the connection with the self, or with a counterpart, whom you might touch. These might be children or partners or maybe even an animal. In the paintings, sometimes they're horses, but they can also be apples that grow to enormous proportions in dreams and crush the horse and rider.

- 16 MA: Allow me to make an observation now that applies to many of your paintings, including the *Sleepers*. There's this particular repertoire of figures that are almost cartoonish and pop up time and again in your work. My impression is that these figures represent particular states of being, that they each bring something very specific to the paintings: the horse that carries things, the bird that makes sounds. This essentially all began with the *Marfa* paintings, and then you developed it further using titles that are in some cases highly expressive: *Knilche* or *Wiener Vögel*, colloquial terms for oddballs that could also be stock characters in the *commedia dell'arte*. There's something comical about these characters, and they can do things that would otherwise be impossible in the real world, just like slapstick characters.

TP: I'm not a big fan of humorous art, but these *Knilche* do grant me a kind of freedom to step outside of the seriousness, which can also feel restrictive at times. They enable me to get some distance from myself, breathe some fresh air into the process, and then that distance allows me to take a more critical view of myself. As you mentioned, there's a whole ensemble of characters: *Birdylove*, for example, is about my son Thelonious, whose middle name is Birdy, but it's also about the "bird," which is a local expression for a weirdo. Something typically Viennese, like a figure from the Prater, the historical local amusement park.

17 MA: Your reference to the Prater is very fitting! One of the “birds” in question actually occupies a very prominent position in the exhibition, above the entrance to one of the side rooms. It’s a joke we made in the hanging of the exhibition—and a good one, we hope!—because the bird is perched near a “forest”: well, a group of paintings that all have something to do with apple trees. In these paintings, you can see pairs of amorous lovers—in some cases pretty well-hidden—which of course instantly evoke thoughts of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden. But what’s especially interesting is what you’ve done in formal terms with the idea of the tree and with the apples, these round shapes that are depicted piled up, or suspended, or falling.

TP: The idea behind the bird is that it keeps watch over the entire exhibition and flies around, but it always stays in the vicinity of the trees because that’s where it feels the safest. The apple tree is the species of tree that has always been closest to my heart, ever since I was a child. And then there’s the art-historical dimension, of course, with the Adam and Eve paintings. Most of these apple tree paintings are titled *Lovers*: a couple in love beneath an apple tree. But in reality, it’s actually all about the trees where the lovers have really inscribed themselves, as if they were tattooed or carved into them. The way they’re painted, it’s as if they were emerging from the bark, and the act of love is also static, just like the tree. The most movement in the paintings is probably in the apples that are dropping from the tree or have already fallen to the ground.

MA: As it happens, these images don’t technically belong together in the same way as the groups of paintings that make up *Bonner Raum* or *Seven Days*). We’ve borrowed them from several different sources.

TP: Yeah, we more or less turned them into one work and inserted this whole apple forest into the exhibition space. And it’s really a rustic version. If you compare it to Lucas Cranach’s *Adam and Eve*, for example, it’s painted in a properly rustic style.

MA: What we call *Bauernmalerei*, that is, rustic painting or folk art.

TP: And hanging directly across from the apple tree forest is a solitary painting of a tree, but it serves a different purpose. With the row of trees, you get the feeling that they're actually in the room with you, but the smaller painting is more like a window: you feel like you're looking out of the room at a similar scene some way off in the distance. Once from the outside inwards, and once from the inside outwards.

- 18 MA: To conclude our tour of this floor, let's finish up with a question about the *Redeemers* from 2021. There are several of these paintings, and we chose the very last one to be included in the exhibition. I think the *Redeemers* are special because you've invented a particular character in the paintings: the figure of a female savior. In the other paintings in the group, she approaches the viewer head-on on horse-back, or is balancing, for example, on apples, but she always has these planetary dimensions with this tiny head and these small arms and legs. The painting featured here also includes a reference to the crucifixion; you've depicted the figure with the stigmata and with a skull for a head.

TP: I wanted to create a series of images that people could immediately read in physical terms, which is why I chose this yeasty, doughy figure. The idea was to create a savior, even though I believe that we can only really save ourselves. The traditional savior figure is a thin little man, a real bag of bones, so I decided to change its gender and make it into this rotund woman—a kind of shell that you can cloak yourself in in order to find salvation. This savior has a globe for a belly, this big yeasty dough ball belly, and is always coming towards the viewer, embracing them. There are a number of them, and they all play different roles.

MA: In our case, death.

TP: Yes, but isn't she also expecting a child?

Level – 2b

19 MA: Let's take a look now at the smaller exhibition space on the second basement level, which opens up a door into something else entirely. There's a wall painting here that was designed especially for this room. You've created a number of wall paintings and site-specific paintings over the course of your career. The moon face that we discussed briefly earlier when we were on the ground floor makes a reappearance here in the form of a bronze casting. How did this face end up in the wall painting?

TP: The wall painting is supposed to act as a kind of echo of the entire exhibition. An echo. Can you say that?

MA: A reverberation.

TP: A reverberation, exactly. An oversized drawing that's somehow related to the figure from *Untitled (Mädchen)*. And I've incorporated the four bronze heads you mentioned into the composition. These bronzes are casts I made of a sun head that I carved when I was twelve or thirteen, for a gate on my parents' farm. It never ended up being installed and has been with me ever since. Then at some point I decided to make a cast of it so that I could usher the head into a new dimension, or rather, into the present. And then I noticed that this head is actually very similar to the self-portrait.

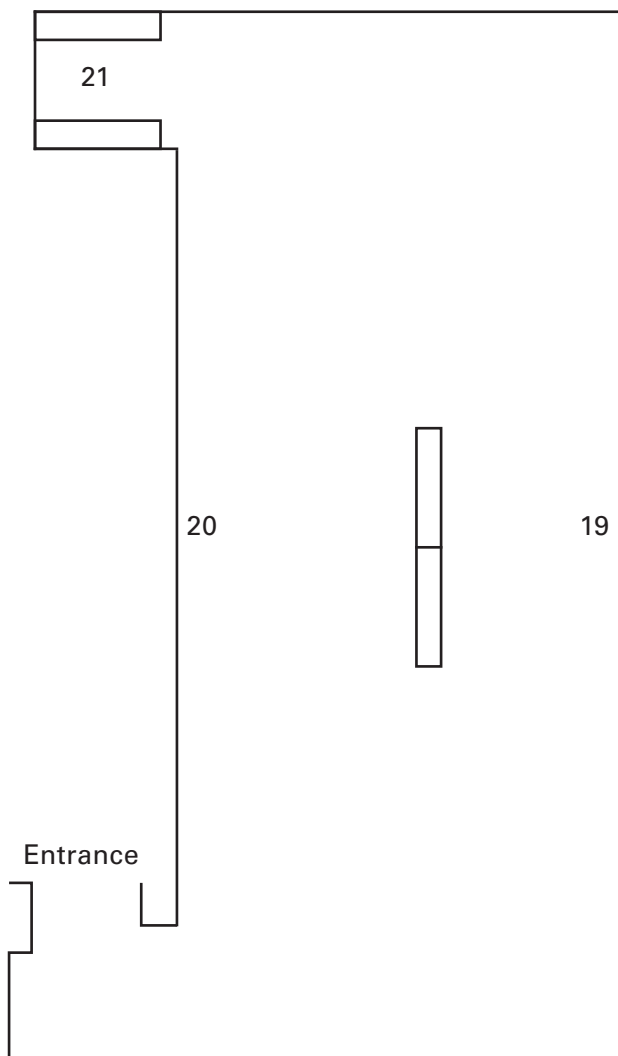
MA: Was that intentional?

TP: Entirely unintentional. That's where 'little Tobi' shines through.

20 MA: Hanging across from the wall painting are thirty-nine small pencil drawings. You created them between 2020 and 2022, which was also when you transitioned from floor to easel. The drawings are something of a leitmotif that runs through this process. In this exhibition, you've labeled them *Alphabet*, which imbues them with a programmatic feel.

TP: They're actually all separate drawings, but in the context of this exhibition I consider them to be one single work. Our alphabet, an unending alphabet. I didn't produce them in my studio; I drew them while I was traveling or at home when my kids had already gone to bed. There's a certain limitation that comes with a pencil and a small sheet of paper, and within this limitation, there's an infinite wealth of possibilities. These thirty-nine drawings actually feature all manner of things—from deer to apples to ... But at the same time, they were all sketches, drafts, blueprints for something new, for new paintings that I was producing at the same time—on the easel. The key difference is in the degree of distance or detachment from the image, and the drawings really helped with that. Planning a painting is vastly different from working on the floor, being up close to it. When I worked on the floor, one thing would invariably lead to another, which was what happened with the *Adaptives*; my intuition took the lead—the draft was ultimately also the finished artwork. Here, it was more about the transformation of the drawing, the plan, the concept—how do I go about translating that, and what will happen in the process? Sometimes it was possible to translate things one-to-one, and other times that just didn't work at all. The ink drawings displayed in the side rooms that come off the larger exhibition space function very differently. They're meditations on finished paintings—how does it feel to trace your way back, with your eyes closed, through a problem that you've already solved? Not to think, but to feel. Blind drawings. Not literally, but in terms of intention. That's the main difference between the pencil drawings and the ink pieces.

Level – 2b



21 MA: Let's conclude our conversation by turning now to the oldest work of yours in this exhibition. It actually transports us way back into the past, to a time period that isn't actually covered by this show. And it also serves as a reminder that you've always collaborated with other people. In this case, it's the Austrian poet Friederike Mayröcker, who passed away in 2021, and with whom you shared an extensive exchange throughout the 1990s. We're showing a series of works on paper here that combine text and drawing and that you two created together. Perhaps you'd like to leave us with some parting words about this early work ...

TP: I think it's great that these works have been included in the exhibition, because I also see painting as a language in its own right. And in this case, I collaborated with someone who quite literally worked with language—with written language. But here, she uses drawing as a kind of hybrid between text and image. I made a book in collaboration with Friederike Mayröcker, and these double pages were actually supposed to be a special edition that we wanted to add to the book. The idea was that I would send Friederike one page and she would respond on the other side—or vice versa. But once we'd finished the drawings, we decided that we definitely couldn't hand them over for the special edition, and instead we'd make a separate book out of them, but that never ended up happening. The drawings are being exhibited here for the very first time. We would have titled our book *Kopfland*.

MA: *Kopfland*—land of the head—is a beautiful word to end our conversation with. Let's leave it there.

TP: Amen.

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Tobias Pils. Shh

September 27, 2025 – April 12, 2026

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Sylwester Syndoman, with must. museum standards

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