

## SCHEMATIC

Sources for Zhou Siwei's paintings are usually preexisting compositions of colors and forms, such as logos or other designs, for example a tutorial on how to make digital drawings on a computer or a computer graphic of a dune. Zhou Siwei says he is interested in schematic depictions because of their effect on the beholder. Although in English or German, "schematic" is associated with rather negative concepts, like "uniform" or "formulaic," the word's meaning in Chinese tends more toward showing the meaning or the "essence." Immanuel Kant's definition goes in a similar direction. According to him, schemata are the transcendental link between sensual observation and the concepts of reason. They connect insight, perception, and sense. Kant wasn't talking about schematic images; rather, he coined the concept of "schema" to describe how the human brain structures information and creates patterns. Yet, his definition helps to understand the ambiguous nature of schematic designs. A schematic image is also both abstract and concrete. It doesn't depict a specific object, for example, but portrays a universal idea of it. In that sense, it is closer to words and language than to the world of concrete visual impressions. It is an abstract invention that identifies and stands for a group of things. Additionally, a dune looks more like a symbol of a dune, with its exaggerated and emblematic appearance. But still, the painting is a concrete object and thus also an object for the mind.

Zhou Siwei thinks that this reduced, abstract imagery will leave viewers feeling empty and ambivalent, due to its lack of connection to the real, sensuous world. Furthermore, the artist confuses viewers with his choice to exhibit the landscape-format painting like a portrait, hanging it vertically so that the shape of the dune only becomes recognizable after the viewer reads the title and turns his head. Often Zhou Siwei already turns the paintings around while working on them.

Zhou Siwei's paintings are especially hard to comprehend if you don't stand in front of the original. The reproduction simply cannot constitute the variety of different nuances and layers. When photographed, the different colors merge into one shade. What looks like blue is actually a combination of various shades of blue and pink. Each of Zhou Siwei's paintings takes on a color scheme that is rich, yet somewhat neutral. His colors are bright without being vibrant, and the closer you are to Zhou Siwei's paintings, the more vivid and diverse the colors get. The complex layers are the result of the artist's work process. When painting, Zhou Siwei allows himself to be experimental and creates a lot of space to develop the work. He says that it needs courage to paint on the white, empty canvas. In order to overcome this hesitation, he starts with random colors, which he will paint over again, until he is satisfied with the result. In the end the beholder can only imagine that the painting has changed from pink to purple to blue to brown. The paint doesn't mix because the artist lets it dry fully after completing a new layer. The drying process takes time, so Zhou Siwei works on several paintings at once. He calls his method the "round studio," because the paintings hang on the walls of his studio and he works on one after the other, going around in circles. His sculptural works stand in the middle of his studio and he works on them while waiting for the paint to dry. Because of this routine, all works are connected. It sounds like a very efficient work flow, but it actually takes much longer than one would expect. It takes up to two years to complete some of the works. Also the paintings don't appear to have as many layers as they really have. Zhou Siwei dilutes the color with a lot of oil and never uses white in his paintings. As a result, his layers are transparent, on purpose. "I want the different layers all to be transparent, and leave them visible to the viewers, although some are not very accurate or appropriate." One can also recognize each brushstroke. The brushstrokes give a certain rhythm to the paintings, while the depth of the transparent layers adds the element of time.

As the idea of the round studio also implies, Zhou Siwei regards his oeuvre as a whole, as a process of evolution and repetition. The relationship between the individual works is apparent. The artist also created the sculptural work in the exhibition, *MODEL 01 (NO IMAGE)*, in relation to the paintings on display. He placed a variety of shapes sculpted out of pink resin on a wooden shelf with a white top. The heavy shelf contrasts with the lightweight sculptures. Here, the practice is a contrary one; he doesn't build up layer after layer, but destroys the original shape of the resin block. One of the pale pink objects is reminiscent of the *BUBBLE* paintings, while another shape corresponds to *FENCE*. For Zhou Siwei, these sculptural objects are his connection to reality, first, because they are tangible, and second, because

working by hand seems to him more concrete than the transcendental space he creates with diluted oil colors. His sculptural works transfer the abstract designs back into three dimensions and, in doing so, transform them back into to a concrete object that again belongs in the realm of the senses.