

Imi Knoebel (Dessau, 1940) brought a radical vision to German abstract painting. Coming of age as theorists spoke of the ‘death of painting’, Knoebel’s study at the Dusseldorf Kunstakademie under Joseph Beuys who acquainted him with the works of contemporary figures including Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni and Lucio Fontana. Knoebel took from this discursive environment a willingness to push painting to a different kind of limit, to deconstruct the distinction between the work and the space in which it is seen with a deftness and lucidity that has defined his practice over decades. Knoebel’s painterly idiom, which combines elements of the syntax of minimalism and the aesthetics of constructivism, examines the dynamics of shape, colour, surface, and structure, as well as probing the unstable interstitial space between painting and sculptural object. Historical painterly concerns like that of figure and ground also feature in Knoebel’s work, querying where a painting begins and ends in relation to where it is sited and where it is seen. He is also known for developing certain imagistic themes over a period of time, working through bodies of work in cycles and then moving to new ones. Knoebel’s relentless determination to innovate within abstraction is one of the qualities that has made his work so enduring.

Abstract

Imi Knoebel’s radical language of abstraction dissolves historical distinctions of figure and ground, redefining the spaces in which his works are shown, flattening and extending dimensionalities and discourses.