

ZERO INTERNATIONAL
The Avant-Garde of the 1950s and 1960s

with works by

Otto Piene, Günther Uecker, Heinz Mack, Enrico Castellani, Agostino Bonalumi,
Turi Simeti, Dadamaino, Paolo Scheggi, Nanda Vigo, Piero Manzoni, Walter Leblanc,
Bernard Aubertin, Christian Megert, Hermann Goepfert, Adolf Luther ..

6 December 2014 to 24 January 2015

Vernissage: 5 December, 7-9 p.m.

ZERO is silence. ZERO is the beginning. ZERO is round. ZERO is ZERO

With these legendary words, the poem penned by Otto Piene, Günther Uecker and Heinz Mack in 1963 concludes. At the time, numerous exhibitions in the spirit of ZERO had already been held across Europe. Founded by Otto Piene and Heinz Mack in Düsseldorf in 1957, the ZERO art movement responded to a profound urge to start anew after the shattering experiences of World War II and the post-war era.

5-4-3-2-1-0! Possibilities exist precisely in the moment of zero, the moment before the rocket takes off. Art was to commence at this zero point; it was to initiate excitement, creative free scope and the potential for transformation – a new and open perspective, rid and free of history.

Thus, the art of ZERO is often about light. Space, movement and vibrations are decisive. Fire, as a concentrated manifestation of light, and soot as well as smoke play an important role. Lightness and monochromaticism stand for the liberating elements of expansiveness. In addition, objects of everyday life are discovered for artistic purposes: Günther Uecker – who, together with Piene and Mack, formed the core of ZERO from 1961 onwards – uses nails for his works; Jean Tinguely in turn relies on machinery parts for his kinetic sculptures; and Daniel Spoerri creates assemblages out of breakfast crockery. The two latter artists were later to join the group of Nouveaux Réalistes.

This experimental spirit is the common element uniting the Düsseldorf artists, but it also quickly spreads across the world. A penchant for the monochrome and the serial, and materials such as light and fire, find passionate expressions in art from Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy and France. Early friendships with Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni, who ran the Galleria Azimut in Milan, foster an exchange. ZERO is subsequently exhibited in Italy from early on. Furthermore, a close kinship with Lucio Fontana, who opened up and liberated the canvas into the third dimension, plays an important role, and he acts as the spiritual father for the generation of ZERO artists.

The connections to Paris, Rotterdam and Amsterdam are equally as strong as those to Milan. Yves Klein's monochrome works in the colour "International Klein Blue" and his fire paintings exert a profound influence from Paris. There is collaboration with artists in Zagreb; and despite different cultural conditions, a similar tendency emerges in Tokyo. ZERO can thus be deemed one of the great international art and spiritual movements in the second half of the twentieth century. Yet the ZERO artists do not wish to be regarded as a coherent group - they rather see themselves connected at the origin of the movement.

Exceptionally unique artistic oeuvres were created until the dissolution of the core group in Germany in 1966. This synergetic era provided a fertile creative terrain for autonomous artistic paths to develop. The pioneering spirit exerted a lasting stylistic influence and provided inspiration for numerous contemporary artists.

In this year - a year so significant for ZERO, with a major retrospective being held at the Guggenheim Museum in New York - we are particularly pleased to be presenting some of the most important international protagonists of the movement in our exhibition.

*Zero is silence. Zero is the beginning. Zero is round.
Zero spins. Zero is the moon. The sun is Zero. Zero is
white. The desert Zero. The sky above Zero. The night -,
Zero flows. The eye Zero. Navel. Mouth. Kiss. The milk
is round. The flower Zero the bird. Silently. Floating. I
eat Zero, I drink Zero, I sleep Zero, I am awake Zero,
I love Zero. Zero is beautiful, dynamo, dynamo, dyna-
mo. The trees in springtime, the snow, fire, water, sea.
Red orange yellow green indigo blue violet Zero Zero
rainbow. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold and silver, sound and smo-
ke. Travelling circus Zero. Zero is silence. Zero is the
beginning. Zero is round. Zero is Zero.*

(Otto Piene, Günther Uecker, Heinz Mack, 1963)