



Z E R O



countdown to the future



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**countdown
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ZERO. Countdown to the Future
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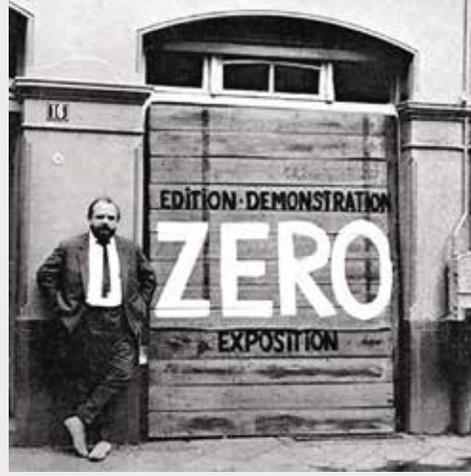
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preface suzan sabancı dinçer

CHAIRMAN AND EXECUTIVE BOARD
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The continent-wide destruction in the wake of the Second World War not only affected Europe's politics and economy, but also had a huge impact on modern art. During those heady days, ZERO became one of the most important avant-garde trends of its time, just as it proposed a world without limits, and set its sights at tomorrow and all that was new.

Since its inception, ZERO has reshaped modern art with its innovative approach, and as art aficionados worldwide slowly rediscover this singular movement in post-war German art, it is our great pleasure to bring the exhibition 'ZERO.Countdown to the Future' to Turkey.

As well as supporting the economic growth of our country, one of Akbank's principle aims is to elevate the level of cultural and educational discourse in Turkey. Ever since the days of our early history, we have supported culture and the arts by bringing them to the masses, and fostered creativity and critical thought. As Turkey's most valuable brand, we always have the best in mind for our country. We are working vigorously to generate ideas that will help carry our society towards the future.

Our greatest motivations remain the same: further advancement of the arts, preservation of our local and universal legacy, and penetration of art's innovative and transformative power in every layer of our society. Therefore, we believe that ZERO will leave a lasting impression in Istanbul. We hope that this great exhibition, a collaboration with the Sakıp Sabancı Museum, will prove to be an unforgettable experience that takes all our visitors to the unique and magical world of art.



The story of holding the “ZERO. Countdown to the Future” exhibition at the Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum began with a meeting in Venice with Heinz Mack, one of the founders of this major art and thought movement, and continued by seeking out his sculpture, *Sky Over Nine Columns*.

My friendship with Heinz Mack and his wife Ute Mack, which began during his exhibition that opened simultaneously with the 2014 Architecture Biennial, has led to Turkish art lovers becoming acquainted with ZERO, the most important avant garde movement of the mid-20th century.

ZERO carried us to post-war Germany, specifically Düsseldorf, which became a leading art centre in the 1950s. There we were reminded of how a group of young artists whose visions sparked by an idea that seemed utopian had changed the European art milieu in the course of a decade.

Naturally the Second World War, which was so disastrous for all of Europe, left the profoundest marks on Germany. Although the war ended in May 1945, after bombs raining down on the cities, days spent in shelters, nights blacked out and cities in ruins, Germany was left with not only devastated cities but terrible poverty, an atmosphere of despair, anxiety and despond.

More than ten years after the war, despite the changing political situation and extraordinary efforts to rebuild the economy, which has been described as the “German miracle”; among intellectuals in particular continuing pessimism laid the ground for quests in new directions.

It was in this atmosphere that the ZERO movement was born, and despite its brief existence between 1957 and 1967, it pioneered a profound change in art.

Otto Piene ve Heinz Mack, two young men who were not only artists but also well educated in philosophy, started an initiative that proposed “shaking off pessimism and starting afresh from zero”. Their works of art created in this spirit could find no exhibition venue apart from their own run-down studios, but they soon became a magnet for many young artists who shared their anxieties and aspirations.

Günther Uecker, a third artist who had a similar vision, joined Piene and Mack, and these three founders, together with three major artists, Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana and Piero Manzoni, whom they regarded as their “forerunners”, they soon drew many artists from almost every corner of Europe and some from places as far away as Japan, together around the ZERO philosophy.

Thanks to this interest ZERO exhibitions moved steadily from one-night shows in humble studios to exhibitions in eminent galleries, and to acceptance of their work by museums. When founder Heinz Mack announced the end of ZERO at the last exhibition in 1967, the ZERO concept had long since stamped its mark on a period of 20th century European contemporary art, despite a life span of just ten years.

preface

dr. nazan ölçer

DIRECTOR, SABANCI UNIVERSITY
SAKIP SABANCI MUSEUM

The ZERO movement was of course a product of its time. In this period when new technologies were flourishing, the space race was at its height and reaching the moon was no longer a dream, art was adapting to these dizzying developments. ZERO challenged the static approach of traditional art, imprisoned in canvas and frame; taking a completely new path that was constantly in flux and invited viewers to communicate, and allowing modern technologies to find an extensive place in the concepts of modern art. But the focal point was always light. Every area of the world, distant lands and even deserts were theirs, but not content with that, carrying the art platform into space became another utopian dream.

Today, more than fifty years on, when evaluating these artists who carved out for themselves a role in art that was quite unlike anything so far, and the brief life of the ZERO movement, we respect all the hope they conveyed, the optimism they spread and their almost child-like enthusiasm. At the same time we can see how far ahead of their time they were in both their art and discourse, and for how many art movements and ideas they opened a door. In this probably lies the secret of how the movement has made such an extraordinary comeback more than fifty years after it was founded.

Heinz and Ute Mack first put me on the path that led to this ZERO exhibition. I am most grateful to Michael Beck and Sigifredo di Canossa who cleared this path for me. Elizabeth Goldring Piene, wife of the now deceased Otto Piene, gave her support to our project from the start and agreed to loan some very important works from her own collection. I am indebted to Christine Uecker-Steinfeld, wife of the third founder Günther Uecker, for loaning the works by him in our exhibition; and to Rotraut Klein-Moquay and Daniel Moquay for works from the Yves Klein Archives.

Curator of the exhibition is Mattijs Visser, Founding Director of the ZERO Foundation, whose extensive knowledge and experience has allowed us to access diverse collections and arrange for the most important works of the ZERO movement to be loaned to our museum. I can hardly thank him enough for his invaluable knowledge and advice.

My insistence on an exhibition concept that differed from those that have been held one after the other in major museums around the world in recent years, including that which is still ongoing at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, sparked serious debate between myself and Mattijs Visser, and another great expert, my valued friend Sir Norman Rosenthal. Finally we reached agreement on an exhibition that was limited only to the movement's founders and their "father figures", but was nonetheless far-reaching. I am grateful for their understanding and support.

I also wish to thank all the museums, foundations, archives, galleries, institutions and private collectors who have loaned works for this exhibition. They are too numerous to name individually here, but you can find a list in the catalogue.

Although the founders of the ZERO movement parted ways after 1967, they did not abandon the idea of a universe incorporating light, reflections and the sky. I am delighted that Heinz Mack's work *Sky Over Nine Columns*, which introduced me to ZERO, will be shown at our museum throughout this exhibition, and I believe its shimmer that reaches to the sky will convey encouraging feelings to all, just as the ZERO philosophy intended.

We are honoured that this exhibition is taking place under the protective wings of Akbank Sanat, an institution that is such a friend of the arts. For years its valuable support for our museum projects has enabled Turkish art lovers of all ages and from all walks of life to see works by some of the greatest names of modern and contemporary art, as well as allowing us to organize notable scientific meetings and symposiums, and workshops for children and young people.

Thanks to this great trust and support many projects that have made a difference have been accomplished.

I extend my profound thanks first of all to Suzan Sabancı Dinçer, Chairman and Executive Member of the Board of Directors of Akbank; to Hayri Çulhacı, Vice-President and Executive Member of the Board of Directors of Akbank; to Hakan Binbaşgil, General Manager of Akbank; and our esteemed friend Murat Göllü, Senior Vice-President of Corporate Communications.

Our museum's Board of Trustees, starting with Chairman Güler Sabancı and Sevil Sabancı, have as always taken a close interest in this exhibition project and given their full support.

The museum's Exhibitions Manager Hüma Arslaner has organized successive stages of this multi-faceted and challenging project with outstanding professionalism, assisted by young experts on the museum staff, Bahar Ahu Sağın, Çağla Özbek and Nazlı Beşer. Architect Umut Durmuş has worked with us on the project, and Yahya Ulusal Kuş and our museum's technical staff have carried out the project design. Correspondence relating to the exhibition has been undertaken by Hande Erkent Yıldız, Meltem Erkaan Atalan and the Urban Communications team. Educational department activities have been developed by Söz Danışmanlık under Sibel Şengül.

As in the case of all projects on this major scale, financial and administrative coordination has been undertaken by Aytekin Aşlı, under the guidance of Bülent Bankacı, General Secretary of the Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum. We thank Bergen Fine Arts and their team in the person of Gerrit Lichtenberg for ensuring that the exhibits have been transported in line with international standards, and SIMURG Fine Art & International Logistics and their team in the person of Gürsel Doğanay.

We thank Çağatay Anadol and Ayşen Anadol for patiently undertaking the editing, translation and printing of the catalogue, which is the enduring achievement of this project; Gözde Oral for her graphic design and Mas Printing House in the person of Lokman Şahin.

Through their artistic innovation the ZERO artists aimed to dissipate all negative emotions, think positively and look with hope at the future, inspired by the countdown when launching space vehicles, which were the technology of those years.

I hope that this exhibition arouses similar emotions in everyone, and as ZERO's founders said, I hope the ZERO movement is good for us all.



preface mattijs visser

FOUNDING DIRECTOR,
THE ZERO FOUNDATION

A week of 'international demonstrations' was how Henk Peeters, the Dutch member of the ZERO group, envisaged the exhibition 'Nul' (Dutch for Zero) at the Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum in March 1962, the first internationally oriented ZERO exhibition within the walls of a prominent museum. 'Together we want to perform a light ballet by Otto Piene,' wrote Peeters in a letter to director Willem Sandberg. 'We will play Yves Klein's monochrome music, have Günther Uecker shooting arrows, and Piero Manzoni handing out white eggs, etc.' The exhibition presented work by twenty-four artists from nine countries with, according to the invitation for the press preview, 'naturally the latest developments in visual art, whereby the painterly surface has been abandoned, experiments in the field of light projection, vapor, reflection and other means of spatial design will be shown.' It was intended to be a pre-eminently public event –and so it was, as demonstrated by the 13,000 visitors in just sixteen days, attracted to a large degree by the tendentious reporting in the media. 'Museum as dumping ground,' read the headline in a national newspaper. Despite the prickly undertone, another newspaper appeared to be better informed: 'Fontana is the prophet and he has many spiritual sons. They talk a lot, they write a lot and in between they make, shall we say: works of art.'

Over fifty years later this exhibition at the Sakıp Sabancı Museum in Istanbul presents works in a wide range of media, from painting and kinetic art to installations, performances, films and publications. Thanks to this exhibition the younger generation will have the opportunity to discover where the ZERO group stands and the possibilities it offers, and to be influenced by its sensual ideas. As well as the classic ZERO themes of light, vibration and time, the exhibition includes works on more contemporary themes. Among these are the colorful *Inflatables* that Otto Piene designed for the Berliner Neue Nationalgalerie and the *Sky over Nine Columns* that Heinz Mack showed at the 2014 Venice Biennale. Tables and cubes that Günther Uecker used for his performance in the German Pavilion at the 1970 Venice Biennale will be shown here for the first time since then.

Art is a vehicle that brings artists and their ideas together with viewers of art; forging a bond between them that extends beyond boundaries and times. Art works are travellers constantly wandering in time, and every generation takes a new stance towards them. People in Europe after the war, including artists of course, were obliged to come to terms with their existential experiences during the Second World War.

When imperialist attacks ended in destruction and defeat, society and culture underwent significant changes. For a long time society had been dominated by feelings of suspicion, enmity and contempt towards foreign nationals and people belonging to different cultures. But from 1945 onwards this was gradually replaced by a mood of mutual interest and respect between different societies. In particular the young artists of the period set about creating opportunities for exchanging ideas and views. In an article that was published in *The Times* newspaper in Britain in 1964, Otto Piene emphasized the principle of freedom

held by the international ZERO movement and explained that the view of art as something humane and open to the world was of great importance for ZERO: 'The fundamental reason for forming the ZERO group is to bring together artists with similar views. This encounter creates the opportunity for them to interact with one another not just through their art but equally as human beings. We found our friends first in Germany, later on in other European countries, and finally in other places around the world.'

We are proud that this 'ZERO. Countdown to the Future' exhibition at the S.U. Sakıp Sabancı Museum will sustain the principle of transcending and eliminating artistic and geographic borders, which lies at the heart of this movement, and support dialogue between different cultures.



ZERO from düsseldorf sir norman rosenthal*

1945 was indeed 'Stunde Null' – the Zero Hour – for Germany, the terrible moment of reckoning after the unspeakable horrors wrought by Adolf Hitler and his multitude of supporters that had led to ruin and defeat, of which it seemed it might take generations to recover. Just over a decade later, on the 11th April 1957, in a small studio on the outskirts of Düsseldorf belonging to the young artist Otto Piene (b. 1928), ruins still all around, there occurred the first in a series of nine one night 'evening exhibitions'. These were largely organised with his friend from the Düsseldorf Academy, Heinz Mack (b. 1931). At the time of the first exhibition ZERO as such had not been born, neither as style or cultural attitude. A few other artists were invited to participate, all painters, it would seem, working in a regional *informel* manner. The *informel* style of painting and making art emanated largely from Paris – a quasi-abstract expressionist manner that had much to do with personal and existential philosophical ideas that reflected the historical times from which Europe had just emerged. In Paris two of the leading *informel* artists were of German extraction: the extraordinary painter Wols (Wolfgang Schulze) and Hans Hartung. In Germany Emil Schumacher was a leading *informel* artist. All over Germany, in the years directly after the war, there was an explosion of artistic activity; artists' groups, galleries and museums all vied for attention in the media, attempting to recover a sense of modernity that in Germany, prior to 1933 and the Nazi seizure of power, had been largely defined by expressionism. However, one should not forget that there had also been the Bauhaus. It was the Bauhaus that was to define the new style that was to define the New Germany and, indeed, spread all over the world, in new necessary building, design and, ultimately, art.

The art of ZERO that arose out of the new Düsseldorf had a complex birth defined by its two leading protagonists: Piene and Mack, who later were joined by Günther Uecker (b. 1930) in 1961. But the fact was that Düsseldorf was the perfect background for a new art movement. It was, indeed, a flagship city of the 'Economic Miracle' (*Wirtschaftswunder*). The United States' Marshall Plan gave to Western Germany an extraordinary importance in the Cold War stand off between the Soviet Union and the Western powers defined by NATO and the burgeoning European movement towards economic and political unity. Even Turkey was part of this United States-led drive towards Western prosperity: it is perhaps not totally

* Sir Norman Rosenthal is a curator, art historian, and former Exhibitions Secretary of the Royal Academy in London.

coincidental that in 1958 there was a cultural treaty between the relatively newly founded Federal Republic of Germany and Turkey itself. Düsseldorf, situated as it was so close to Paris and equally Amsterdam and Antwerp, became the most visible centre of an internationalism that characterised much German art of that time. An icon of this new prosperity was the Thyssen Skyscraper (ill. 1) which, even today, looms over the city. Known as the 'Three Plate Building' (*Dreischeibenhaus*), it was constructed under the supervision of the architects Hentrich, Petschnigg & Partner. It is not coincidental that this building was commenced in 1957 and completed in 1960 – the very period that saw the classic years of the emergence and spread of ZERO as a vital art movement.



1

There is much discussion, even today, as to what ZERO really was; it defined itself never as a style as such, but rather as an attitude. It was nonetheless always concerned with abstract ideas and individual artist's subjective realisations of the monochrome, light and its absence, movement, connectivity to the four classical elements of Earth, Water, Air and Fire, and, finally, an endless emptiness reaching into outer space. This was an epoch, too, that witnessed the launch of Sputnik in 1957, an event that captivated the imagination of the entire world. It is not irrelevant to mention other moments of political optimism in the public sphere, such as the Festival of Britain in 1951, characterised by Skylon (ill. 2). Closer to home, in Düsseldorf, the first World Fair after the Second World War took place in Brussels in 1958 and was defined by the Atomium (ill. 3). Both these public manifestations anticipate images to be created by ZERO, which is not in any way to deny its significance within the world of art and its own sense of Platonic purity.



2

It was an older Constructivist sculptor, Norbert Kricke (b. 1922), who suggested to the amazingly enterprising Düsseldorf gallerist Alfred Schmela that he bring Yves Klein and his work to the city. As a result, Klein, whose show opened in May 1957, not only connected closely with the ZERO artists, who by this time were beginning to invent their novel style of making art, but also connected them to a far wider network of figures in Paris and in Milan, in particular leading with Lucio Fontana and Piero Manzoni. Each of these artists, especially Klein and Manzoni, were to make a huge impact in the cultural world in and around Düsseldorf. They were joined in this very much by Jean Tinguely.



3

Rapidly, by September 1957, ZERO reached a definition of its own style, deciding on the publication of the magazine, *ZERO*, which had three outstanding issues. The first opens with a statement attributed to Hegel that reads: 'Red is indeed the concrete colour.' It then proceeds to ask leading established critics, mostly conservative, such as Arnold Gehlin and Hans Sedlmayr, to respond to the question as to what extent does contemporary painting contribute to the formation of the modern world. The answers were predictably negative! Piene was to show in this first magazine exhibition his very first raster paintings. The title that was to define the movement was arrived at after much discussion. It, Piene has said, was conceived as a zone for silence and new possibilities, and certainly not nihilistically or in a Dadaistic frame of mind. It also celebrated the launching of those new rockets into space:

four,
three,
two,
one,
ZERO – lift off!

Here was a lift off into what can only be described as the beautiful unknown. By the time the seventh evening exhibition took place, once more in the studio

of Piene and Mack, no less than 45 artists participated, among them not only Klein, but also the French abstract painter Georges Mathieu. Also there, rather surprisingly, perhaps, given his surrealistically figurative style of painting, was the Düsseldorf artist Konrad Klapheck, who also seems to have made a considerable contribution to the editing of the first of the *ZERO* magazines. All this underlines the wide connectivity of the *ZERO* enterprise, to other art movements taking place across the Western world, including the United States. Beyond that there are issues of affinity. For instance, one can easily argue that the by then famous Abstract Expressionism, epitomised by the increasingly dominant, globally exported New York School, divided into those who might be said were part of an international Tachistic way of painting, for instance de Kooning and Kline, Gorky and Guston. On the other side, with a greater affinity to *ZERO*, were Newman, Rothko and Reinhardt. Others, like Pollock, had tendencies both ways, and even in the next generation Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg can be seen to have *ZERO* aspects each in their own way – these were occasionally recognised at the time, but not often. When Rothko, always an open minded and interested artist, saw the first New York exhibition of *ZERO* at the Howard Wise Gallery in 1962, that included only the three Düsseldorf artists, is said to have declared that he too could be ‘perceived as being part of the movement’. We should not forget that these were the years that witnessed, too, the emergence of Frank Stella and the early manifestations of minimalism and land art. All these American movements increasingly dominated the discourse, and it is perhaps only now that analogous European and other manifestations, such as *ZERO*, are being recognised as having their own legitimate history. In retrospect, it is astonishing to see how much dialogue there was in terms of exhibition participation and other forms of connectivity throughout the international art world. Düsseldorf may not have been *the* capital of world art but it certainly was *a* centre alongside other cities in Italy, Switzerland, Britain and, of course, the United States where New York had by then replaced Paris as the centre of the discourse, the dissemination of concepts in painting and sculpture, and the burgeoning new media.

A vital exhibition for Mack, Piene and Uecker, that had the strongest *ZERO* component, took place in Antwerp between March and May 1959. It was called ‘Vision in Motion – Motion in Vision’ after a publication by the Hungarian Bauhaus artist and teacher Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Moholy-Nagy’s work was in the long-term decisive for the Visual Studies programme of MIT in Harvard, where later Piene was to become director as the successor of another fascinating Hungarian figure, György Kepes. Other participants in the Antwerp exhibition included, as well as Yves Klein, Dieter Roth, Daniel Spoerri, Pol Bury, the American Robert Breer and the Venezuelan Jesús Raphael Soto. Beyond abstract expressionism the world of *ZERO* had even strong affinities with even the artistic production of Op Art, Nouveau Realisme, Situationism, Gutai, Land Art and even aspects of Pop-art itself, particularly as it developed in Britain with artists such as Richard Hamilton who had held his famous exhibition ‘This is Tomorrow’ with the Independent Group in 1956. These are a wealth of names and movements to be absorbed, but it is necessary to review them in order to understand the optimism that pervaded the art and culture of the Western world at the time. The Gutai movement, for example, was a phenomenon that independently arose in a defeated Japan deliberately seeking new forms of making art, reaching within a deeply conservative society towards a radical interaction between spirit and matter and outreaching to the wider world.

Another major cultural moment for the world around Düsseldorf was the opening in 1959 of the music theatre in the Ruhr town of Gelsenkirchen (ill. 4). The architect was Werner Ruhnau, who commissioned to Yves Klein, vast murals that covered the foyers of the theatre that had been conceived in the spirit of London's Royal Festival Hall. Many other ZERO artists, not limited to Mack, Piene and Uecker, were invited to participate in several architectural projects varying from wall decoration, furniture, objects for children to light objects and installations. At the same time they exhibited in solo and group exhibitions from Amsterdam, Milan, Bern in Switzerland, to Rome, London, Philadelphia and New York. The tracing of these connections is endlessly fascinating. There are the direct connections, which can be documented, and the affinities, which can be sensed by a more general knowledge of the various art movements and happenings that were taking place simultaneously in different parts of the world.

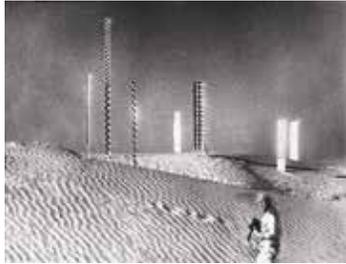


Ultimately, though, it is necessary to consider each artist as an individual making the contribution within an overall Zeitgeist with his own recognisable identity. The three artists of ZERO, for all the connections that they made that led to friendships, joint exhibitions, participations in publications, each had his own recognisable identity and, indeed, purposeful projects that each set about to fulfill. Piene, who came from a philosophical as well as an artistic background, was essentially motivated by the relationship between science and art. This accounts for his playful use of light effects in his famous *Light Ballet*, which were presented as early as 1959 using grid objects through which he shone light, and which he continued to stage throughout his long career. These light ballets, in a simple way, gave the viewer/participant a sense of the moving heavens and a connection with an outer space beyond. In many interviews Piene refers to the strange wonderment that as a child of war he felt watching air raids where the sky was illuminated by light effects. For him pitch dark of the black outs imposed during these air raids were even more threatening and he was to share the relief and even disbelief felt after the war at being able to switch on the light at will. His paintings using smoke and fire, which obviously have affinities to the works of Yves Klein, nonetheless have their own singular feeling for colour, not to speak of identifiable touch and form. Red became that essential aspect of his way towards non-objectivity that was forcefully outlined in that first *ZERO* magazine. Later, Piene went to the United States, which ultimately became his principal arena of activity. Joining MIT clearly enabled him to use art to investigate natural phenomena: the classic four elements once more. Piene's interest in the participatory led him to stage what essentially were early Happenings alongside his Düsseldorf colleagues. For example, there was a famous 'ZERO demonstration' that took place on the banks of the Rhine in May 1962 that consisted of women dressed in ZERO costumes, blowing soap bubbles, and holding grapes made out of balloons within installations improvised out of tinfoil, accompanied, of course, by live music and dancing. It is beautifully documented in an early television film called *0 x 0: Painters without Paints and Brushes*, which reached a wide audience in Western Germany.

The ZERO artists, having begun with their private evening exhibitions, at the beginning attended by relatively few, were reaching a broad public. As a group they were now constantly invited to show in many of the leading Kunsthallen and museums that had been re-founded in Germany – most aiming consciously to put on the very latest thing in art. At that time ZERO was exactly this. It is interesting that one of the artists very close to Piene and his colleagues was Hans Haacke. Having begun his career around this time as an artist making kinetic abstract



5



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sculptures involving living ecosystems, Haacke was within a few years, after John F. Kennedy was assassinated, to turn his attention as the focus of his art to a critique of current capitalist political and economic realities, as they were defined and reflected by the art world. Both Piene and Haacke were to make their careers as artists and as teachers in the United States. Ultimately artistically they went separate ways. Piene remained concerned with the representation of natural phenomena that perhaps achieved its most prominent moment with the *Rainbow* that he made for the Munich Olympic games in 1972 (ill. 5). By that time the German student revolution and all the cultural developments that went with it were already well underway. If Piene and his colleagues went out of fashion during those years and are coming back now into the discussion, it is perhaps because those moments of disillusionment (which ultimately caused their disbandment in 1966 with a final exhibition in Bonn) that ZERO artists acknowledge, came with the assassinations of figures of hope such as JFK in 1963 and Martin Luther King in 1968 have now passed into history.

It is now possible to look back on those optimistic years before disillusionment in European intellectual and student circles with a new objectivity. Mack, as with Piene, was quickly realised that the *informel* was not for him, particularly after he went first to Paris where he met Yves Klein and Tinguely, as well as Georges Mathieu. However, his realisation of the ZERO dream after it was established in '59 was quickly to develop a more concrete and individual aspect, even if transparency and the transmission of light was to remain of the essence. There were to come many extraordinary objects of endless variety proposing the kinetic and ornamental potential of light in perpetual movement. The concept too of ornament remained central to his life's project, which is why perhaps his obsession with Islamic mathematics and science, design and architecture is so profound. Nonetheless, perhaps the most characteristic objects that form a leit-motif of his work, both in the strictly ZERO period through to today, are his *Stele* (ill. 6). The Stele always has, of course, a sense of commemoration. In the Greek Classical world it marks aspects of both life and death. In other cultures it might mark boundaries or military victories and through various forms of decoration convey information to those who pass. Given Mack's and his colleagues' concern with emptiness and open space, he as a creative individual with his own sense of purpose and resolve, decided to mark with his sculptures the vast virginal areas of sandy desert and the open seas. These could often only be conveyed to a larger audience by the medium of film and photography. By 1962, Mack was already making experiments with light reflecting Steles in the deserts of Morocco and Algeria. There he was filmed consciously wearing what can only be described as a space suit, anticipating, and also dreaming ahead, as it were, to the famous moonwalk of Buzz Aldrin in 1969. The film that was made in 1968, *Tele-Mack*, that presents an astonishing vision of artificial suns, sand reliefs, reflective walls and other interventions was perhaps, and still is, prophetic of a world that might ultimately harness the energy of the sun for the benefit of all of humankind. The interventions in the empty spaces have their own spectacular aesthetic, which ultimately informs all his work. His work can operate both on a micro and macro level, and there can be no question that he remains one of the most original land artists, anticipating in many ways his now more famous American contemporaries and, dare one say it, followers. Down to the present day there are many younger artists whose interventions in landscape and installations using light, often in the most arresting ways, who surely must find inspiration and equally affinities with Mack's splendid object based light installations. One might almost

imagine Brancusi's stone and wooden sculptures that reach to the sky as transparent light-emitting objects, using the most up-to-date plastic and shimmering metal-based materials that either emit their own light naturally or have electric light components wired in. The works change while moving bodies perceive them. There is an infinite capacity for invention so that even beyond painting, drawing and printmaking, which Mack still continues to do, his work can both delight and continually surprise. A work can be boxed in; it can strive towards the heavens; it can refract; it has its own capacity for luminosity and endless geometry.

The nail is the characteristic vehicle and object in itself that makes possible Günther Uecker's art, and which clearly distinguishes it from the work of Piene and Mack, and indeed all of those artists who considered themselves part of the ZERO network, particularly in the early years. He in fact joined the group a little later, not until 1963, and rapidly found affinity to the other two, and other artists like Klein, Manzoni and, for instance, the Dutch artist Jan Schoonhoven, born as early as 1914, but who associated himself closely with the Düsseldorf group. Uecker's work is characterised by an absence of colour, and is often object based, into which the nails are driven, which have their own way of reflecting light and darkness. But equally they have a clear metaphorical resonance whether he is knocking nails into a piece of furniture, such as a table, chair, piano or radio, or into a board that as it were resembles a painting. In that sense they have a Fluxus aspect that even relates them to sculptural works made by Joseph Beuys, who of course knew well his Düsseldorf contemporaries. Sometimes the nails are presented methodically and geometrically, other times as chance occurrences on the surface where they can be imagined as moving personage. In one famous group of phallic sculptures known as *The New York Dancer* (1965) the large nails are electronically connected to give a sinister prickly rippling effect, but on his most famous work *The Cosmic Vision* (1961–81) the nails that are inserted geometrically on large revolving tondos become sensual light refractors that, though different to the light emitting vitrines of Mack, have a not dissimilar effect.

ZERO artists – the Famous Three, as we might call them – and their counterparts whom they chose to involve with their projects were all striving for a world – as Uecker himself says – 'where the production of art ceases to be limited to the individual as it has been until now'. That, to some degree was, of course, the first ambition of the Bauhaus, which even at the outset collapsed divisions between the architect, the craftsman and the artist, or perhaps between design and art, to return ultimately to a world that had always existed before the European Renaissance. As Walter Gropius declared at the end of the first Bauhaus Manifesto of 1919:

'Let us strive for, conceive and create the new building of the future that will unite every discipline, architecture and sculpture and painting, and which will one day rise heavenwards from the million hands of craftsmen as a clear symbol of a new belief to come.'

ZERO never attempted to set up a school as such, nor was it, strictly speaking, connected either to architecture or design, as was the Bauhaus very self-consciously, but as in the Bauhaus, anonymity of design was not, in spite of best intentions, achievable. And like the famous artists of the Bauhaus the ZERO artists, Otto Piene, Heinz Mack and Günther Uecker, increasingly are of interest to us as seminal figures of their youthful inventions, which endure until today.

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