ZERO



countdown to the future



9... 8... 7... 6... 5...

4... 3... 2... 1...



In collaboration

SABANCI UNIVERSITY SAKIP SABANCI MUSEUM

ZERO foundation .de

Exhibition Main Sponsor

AKBANK SANAT

Communication and Technology Sponsor

TURKCELL

ZERO



countdown
to the future

ZERO. Countdown to the Future
Sabancı University Sakıp Sabancı Museum
September 2, 2015 – January 10, 2016

ISBN 978-605-9178-04-04

Exhibition Concept
Dr. Nazan Ölçer
Mattijs Visser
Sir Norman Rosenthal

Curator
Mattijs Visser
Founding Director, Zero Foundation, Düsseldorf

EXHIBITION MANAGEMENT

General Coordination
Bülent Bankacı
Secretary General

Project Management
Hüma Arslaner
Exhibitions Manager

Bahar Ahu Sağın
Exhibitions Specialist

Çağla Özbek
Exhibitions Specialist

Nazlı Beşer
Exhibitions Specialist

Conservation
Nurçin Kural Özgörüş
Conservation Laboratory Manager

Filiz Kuvvetli
Painting Conservation Specialist

Katrin Lohe
ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf

Guenter Thorn

Jochen Saueracker

Financial Coordination
Aytekin Aşlı
Administrative Affairs and
Accounting Manager

Public Relations
Hande Erkent Yıldız
Public Relations and
Communications Specialist

Urban İletişim

Screenings
Asuman Akbabacan
Events Specialist

General Logistics and Hospitality
Zeynep Bayraktar

Education Programs
Söz Danışmanlık

Product Design
Bige Ökten

Technological Coordination
Rind Devran Tukan
Information Technology Specialist

Technical Application
Umut Durmuş
Yahya Ulusal Kuş
Abbas Kılıç
Seyfettin Vıcıl
Mustafa Sıra
Bülent Turan
Salim Yalçın
Ahmet Demirtaş
Emre Macit

Graphic Design
Gözde Oral
Birebir Tasarım Çözümleri Ltd.

Archives Specialist
Osman Serhat Karaman

Administrative Affairs
Şeref Cankur
Administrative Affairs Specialist

Transportation
SIMURG Fine Art & Int'l Logistics
Bergen Fine Arts Logistics A.Ş.
Hasenkamp
Masterpiece
Constantine

Insurance
Axa Art Insurance
Fine Art Business Partner
AON
Kühn & Bülow Versicherungsmakler
GmbH
Allianz

Special thanks to
Consulate General of Germany, Istanbul

CATALOG

Editorial Team
Mattijs Visser
Thekla Zell

Coordination
Çağatay Anadol
Kitap Yayınevi Ltd.

Design
Gözde Oral
Birebir Tasarım Çözümleri Ltd.

Application
Kemal Kara

Translation
Ayşen Anadol
Fatma Artunkal
Taciser Belge
Neyyir Berktay
Türkis Noyan
Zeynep Rona

Copyediting
Çağla Özbek

Printing and Binding
Mas Matbaacılık San. ve Tic. A.Ş.
Hamidiye Mahallesi
Soğuksu Caddesi No: 3
Kağıthane / İstanbul
Tel: +90 212 294 10 00
info@masmat.com.tr
Certificate No: 12055



contents

Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der

10 **preface**
suzan sabancı dinçer

12 **preface**
dr. nazan ölçer

14 **preface**
mattijs visser

16 **ZERO from düsseldorf**
sir norman rosenthal

22 **notes on ZERO**
wieland schmied

30 **group ZERO**
otto piene

34 **chronology**
thekla zell

52 **the new dynamic structure**
heinz mack

54 **the sahara project**
heinz mack

60 **resting restlessness**
heinz mack

62 **opening speech for the fontana exhibition**
otto piene

64 **paths to paradise**
otto piene

66 **on the purity of light**
otto piene

70 **untitled**
günther uecker

70 **on white**
günther uecker

71 **whiteness**
günther uecker

74 **my position in the battle between line and color**
yves klein

76 **free dimension**
piero manzoni

78 **themes**

158 **interview with heinz mack**
hans ulrich obrist

166 **interview with otto piene**
hans ulrich obrist

174 **interview with günther uecker**
hans ulrich obrist

182 **ZERO today interview with daniel birnbaum**
mattijs visser

190 **works on display**

194 **credits**

Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero



preface

suzan sabancı dinçer

CHAIRMAN AND EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBER OF AKBANK

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.

esst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Vogel. S



preface

dr. nazan ölçer

DIRECTOR, SABANCI UNIVERSITY
SAKIP SABANCI MUSEUM

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.

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.

ero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer,

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.

Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zer



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 Nul' – 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

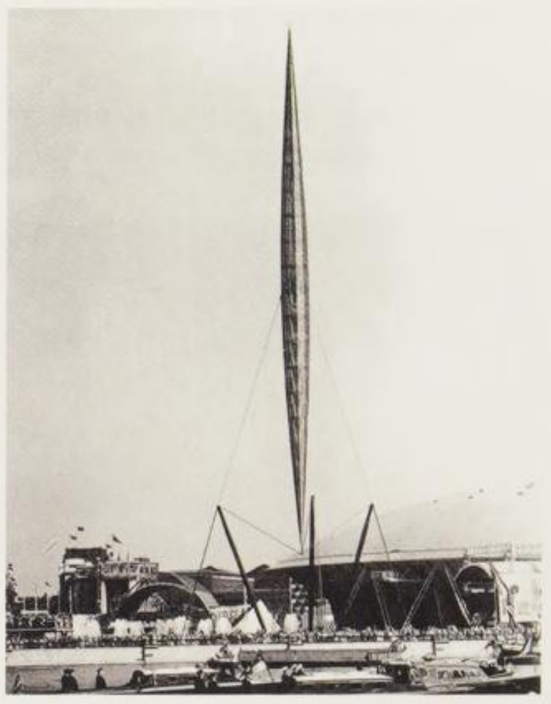
* Sir Norman Rosenthal is a curator, art historian, and former Exhibitions Secretary of the Royal Academy in London.

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.



4

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 Kunsthalles 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

6

sculptures involving living ecosystems, Haacke was within a few years, after John F. Kennedy was assasinated, 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 leitmotif 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 refactors 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.

London, 2015



notes on ZERO

wieland schmied*

I

If something is to be written about Mack, Piene and Uecker, and the ZERO group, which these artists founded, where should we begin? This is a group with connections with other movements, groups, schools and trends in every corner of Europe and across the Atlantic Ocean. The impact of the group in guiding and activating others is often felt; others embrace their ideas, convey them, adopt and alter them. This is a mutual interplay that in terms of art history has its roots in Bauhaus and can be traced in Moholy-Nagy, Marcel Duchamp, the greatest inspiration and pioneer of our century, and beyond. Even explaining the course taken by art history since 1945 is easier than explaining the influences of the ZERO artists.

ZERO has experienced two heydays so far. Once it was on the agenda in Europe, then once again in America, before returning to influence European art. The first period coincided with the late 1950s. The Düsseldorf ZERO artists, who gathered around Mack and Piene, the 'monochrome' artist Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely and Daniel Spoerri, as well as Pol Bury and Jesus Rafael Soto, exhibited their work together: firstly in the spring of 1959 at Hessenhuis in Antwerp, and later the same year in Wiesbaden. In that city they were joined by Holweck, Manzoni and Mavignier. In March 1962 at the 'Nul' exhibition in Amsterdam, Lucio Fontana was admitted to the group as its spiritual 'ancestor'. Although the objectives and works of these artists were very different, they were united at one point: to oppose Tachism and overthrow it. According to the ZERO group, when Tachism's ineffable gods Wols and Pollock died, this art fell into the chasm of epigonism. Spontaneity was confused with speed, the deliberate gesture of the wrist with randomness, freedom of choice of materials with heaping on the material; resulting in works that were sometimes decorative and sometimes soul-darkening filling the galleries. In contrast, ZERO argued for an art that was the product of thought, of a high quality, that could shoulder responsibility, and was based on clear examples and concepts. Although the ZERO artists were very different from one another, they were united at one point: they knew what they wanted from the beginning and tried to achieve this; they controlled and formulated their experiments; and their work carried them forward to tackle new issues. That was the way ZERO succeeded. ZERO was never a group or association, a school or style that was firmly riveted

* The late Wieland Schmied was an art critic and essayist, as well as the former president of the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts, Munich.

together, but constantly divided. The Paris *Nouveau Réalisme* movement, as Pierre Restany called it, moved steadily towards a place different from what the German ZERO artists had intended. In order to distinguish them from the New Realists, Otto Piene proposed the names New Idealists and *sensibilité prussienne* (Prussian sensibility). The second flowering occurred in America in the mid-1960s. Pop-Art was born in parallel with ZERO, in reaction to the dominance of Abstract Expressionism in New York, to the first stages of New Realism in Britain and France, to the relics of Dada and the experiments of Robert Rauschenberg.

While Pop-Art celebrated its most brilliant victory, Op Art or Optic Art, which appealed entirely to the eye, emerged beside Pop-Art and partially took its place; and in one sense pushed aside Pop-Art's often coarse and inexplicable stance of protest against the world of standardized consumption of which Pop-Art was actually a part. Close scrutiny showed that as well as the Bauhaus tradition (the New Bauhaus, Chicago, Mies van der Rohe, and particularly Josef Albers) which lived on in America, other structural trends (Noland, Morris Louis), Victor Vasarely and Groupe de Recherche d'Art Visuel inspired by him that gathered around Le Parc, Morelier and Yvaral; the ZERO group led to the birth of Op-Art and was its source of life.

For this reason it is likely that ZERO may re-emerge in the wake of other movements that do not yet exist today, and bring the comprehensible in place of the incomprehensible, the designed in place of the spontaneous, and the humane in place of the primitive; thereby constantly creating a new beginning.

II

What does 'ZERO' mean?

When, after a long stay in China, Mark Tobey retreated to the silence of a Zen monastery in Kyoto in 1934, they first handed him a piece of paper on which a circle, a zero, was drawn. The monks who welcomed him told him to take the paper on which the zero was drawn to his room, hang it on the wall, and meditate in front of it. This was apparently the first stage of Zen. Tobey did what the monks said. We know this was the first artistic experience Tobey had in the Zen monastery. He himself called it the 'calligraphic impulse', which prompted him to create his works known as 'white writings'.

When Mack and Piene chose the name ZERO for their works, they were thinking neither of Tobey nor Zen. It was just by coincidence that this name came to their minds. The finding of this name is reminiscent of what is said about the origin of the name Dada. In the course of conversation, while searching for a name for a magazine they planned to publish, Piene suggested the following alternatives: Chroma, Puro, Quaro and Zero. Mack came across the word 'zero' in the index at the back of a magazine on the history of photography and read its definition. Everyone immediately accepted the title.

The principal reason for Mack and Piene's interest in the concept of 'zero' was the importance attached to this word when launching spacecraft. The zero (0) at the end of the count down – 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, 0 – marked the moment of greatest importance. But 'zero' was not just the symbol marking a moment of take-off or a zero point. Soon there came the concept of a 'zero area' devoted to exploration of the self, remaining motionless and silent, and thinking. Here undoubtedly 'zero' also had a place as an object of meditation according to Zen monks and Tobey. For Mack, Piene, Uecker, Holweck and Goepfert, 'zero' was an empty area,

a space as yet untrodden; as yet unoccupied by representations, theories and unsuccessful applications; conducive to many new possibilities, a potential source of many new starts, without prior conditions or shackles of the past.

For them, the shackles of the past were not just being obliged to work in a particular style during the years they had spent at the Academy; not were they merely fighting against an obligation that they rejected because they could not reach a different conclusion from what they saw around them.

What they were challenging was a pictorial art consisting of the ruins of Tachism and the Informal movement, which in their view were excessively pessimistic and had lost faith in mankind. In their view these were nothing but a psychogram for *homo miserabilis*; scribbles showing the hopeless conditions of human beings in poverty between derelict walls.

During one conversation with Otto Piene, he told me: 'For the Dubuffet and Tapies generation, indeed for the entire generation that came before us, the most crucial experience was war and the world: earth, material, sand, clay. These were their shelter, their security, their world. They could shelter in a hole in the earth, get into a bunker and be safe in a place that would be their last shelter from the fearsome threats of war. For us, who had not lived through the war, and who were watching them from the outside, these experiences no longer had any powerful impact. In other words, war and the world were no longer the most important and influential experiences. So in our art we do not feel as if we are riveted to the earth. For us it is not important to transfer the materials of the earth to the canvas. Why? For us the most influential and important experience is an age of dreaming about the adventures of the universe. This is an age when people have left the surface of the earth behind and overcome gravity. What interests us is light, fire, air currents, and the infinite possibilities for designing a better, healthier world.'

This optimistic stance taken by Piene clearly distinguishes his New Idealism from the New Realism movement.

III

This is how it all began:

When several young Düsseldorf artists were unable to find a gallery willing or able to exhibit their works, they decided to find their own solution and organize their own exhibition. They chose Otto Piene's studio as the exhibition venue, probably because this was the largest space available to them. The exhibitions were called *Abendausstellungen*, or 'evening exhibitions', because they lasted just one evening and then the exhibits were dispersed. The First Evening Exhibition took place at the beginning of April in 1957. Soon afterwards two galleries were established that took a close interest in young artists in Düsseldorf: Galerie 22 (no longer extant) established by Jean-Pierre Wilhelm and Manfred de la Motte in May 1957, and Galerie Alfred Schmela (which for a long time has been regarded as Germany's first avant-garde gallery) in June of the same year.

At first the Evening Exhibitions were not devoted to a particular style or direction. But over time certain approaches began to take shape and a new trend, a new concept of painting emerged as the nucleus of efforts in different directions. The first step on this path was the Fourth Evening Exhibition held in September 1957. Brüning, Mack, Piene and Salentin participated in this exhibition, at which

Piene showed his first grid paintings. (Mack's works were inspired by Tapies and almost completely devoid of informal elements. They formed the first stage in a series of experiments). The Seventh Evening Exhibition held in April 1958 went one step further. This exhibition was devoted to the theme *Das rote Bild* (The Red Painting) and the color red was predominant in the paintings that were shown. The first issue of *ZERO* magazine was published on the occasion of the Seventh Evening Exhibition and included articles written by artists like Yves Klein, Mack, Piene and Anthony Thwaites. Thwaites had been a friendly supporter of ZERO from the start, and followed its development without refraining from criticism. The second issue of *ZERO* magazine, published for the Eighth Evening Exhibition, was more important than the first. The theme of this exhibition was 'vibration', and works by Oskar Holweck, Heinz Mack, Almir Mavignier, Otto Piene and Zillmann were shown. The second issue of *ZERO* contained articles by Fritz Seitz, Arnold Gehlen, Max Bense, Mack ('Resting Restlessness'), Piene ('The Purity of Light'), Klaus J. Fischer, John A. Thwaites, Hans Platschek and others. Otto Piene declared: 'Here general debates were kept to a minimum, and instead the ideas that preoccupied us were explained, with the intention of being constructive by trying to make positive suggestions to a world that was felt to be full of errors, rather than engaging in polemics...'

The subsequent development of ZERO was influenced by three important encounters in terms of relations between art and people; the encounter with Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely and Lucio Fontana. Yves Klein met the Düsseldorf artists when his works were exhibited at Galerie Schmela. Otto Piene says the following about this event: 'His spiritual animation, which he conveyed to those around him without embarrassment, became the inspiration for our even more ambitious plans. But his influence was more abstract than personal and humane. In later months and years we found the opportunity to discover his artistic and humane qualities (and aspects that were not revealed) during encounters and at joint events in Düsseldorf, Paris and many other places.'

The Düsseldorf artists became more closely acquainted with Jean Tinguely during the 'Vision in Motion – Motion in Vision' exhibition held in Antwerp and Hessenhuis. They first got to know Lucio Fontana in 1959, through Piero Manzoni of Milan. That year Mack visited Fontana in Milan. The acquaintance with Max Bill did not last long. ZERO group members found Bill to be excessively rationalist, while Bill considered that the ZERO artists were not sufficiently consistent. Collective exhibitions in which various artists participated at different times served to encourage international contacts and bring artists together. Following the exhibition in Antwerp that originally was planned to be called 'Le Mouvement', on the evening before the opening of documenta II in 1959, the 'Dynamo' exhibition opened at Galerie Fiebig-Boukes in Wiesbaden. This exhibition was designed as a deliberate antithesis. The 'Concrete Art' exhibition opened at Helmhaus in Zürich in 1960, and the 'Moving Movement' exhibition at Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1961.

IV

This multi-faceted activity reached its first peak with the publication of the third and final issue of *ZERO* magazine. This issue was both the most diverse in terms of content and (as was to become evident later) the most influential. There were several photographs on the first pages: an eye, a star filled sky, the sun in mist, a glistening snow covered area, a shimmering sea, sand dunes shaped by the wind, stones of a pyramid built by human hand that had become part of the landscape;

in short nature and natural forces in material forms. But the natural forces perceived without reference to these forms are the elements of a great game. Then come the players: Fontana slicing a canvas with a knife; Yves Klein with the sky of Nice over his head; Tinguely and the world of technology, which is also a game... Machines working slowly and with difficulty resemble fearful rabbits surrounded by dogs... machines that touch the human heart. Photographs of the romantic 'Homage to New York' exhibition taken in the courtyard of the Museum of Modern Art: a machine destroying itself in half an hour and people shocked by the sight calling the fire department... Then Piene, Mack, Arman, Spoerri, Bury, Soto, Uecker, Kage and others. The issue consisted of relatively less text (60 pages) compared to the many photographs (215 pages). Shots that form a thrilling end to an essay... In the view of the ZERO artists these all demonstrate the relationship between nature and man, technology and art, and have a greater impact than words. They want this relationship to 're-establish harmony' by eradicating prejudices and overpowering influences. Because in the interaction between the forces of nature, just as in the vehicles of technology in the modern world, there are such possibilities and impulses, that people can and should make use of them in their artistic creations, and even in other activities. The book ends with this explanation: 'ZERO: we are living. ZERO: we exist for everything.' Piene later expresses this more explicitly: 'We are on the side of everything, for everything.' The opening of the exhibition held at Galerie Schmela, for which occasion *ZERO 3* magazine was published, was celebrated by the 'ZERO' festival held in the streets of Düsseldorf, with aluminum flags, metal foils, illuminated reliefs, soap bubbles, balloons, projectors and fireworks. This festival was the most striking display that ZERO had ever presented for viewers in its home country.

All the enterprises until then, including *ZERO 3* magazine, had been brought about through the efforts of Mack and Piene. From March 1962, in Amsterdam, Günther Uecker was included among ZERO's core members.

From then on ZERO exhibitions followed in quick succession. It is impossible to discuss each one here. After Schmela Rochus Kowallek in Frankfurt, Müller in Stuttgart and Fried in Ulm supported ZERO. The first museums to purchase ZERO paintings were Krefeld (Paul Wember) and Leverkusen (Udo Kultermann). The museum in Krefeld held the first German retrospective of works by Mack, Piene and Uecker. Among the critics who were interested in ZERO – after Thwaites and excepting some well-known names – were Schmiele, Lehmbruck, Klapheck, de Haas, Reuther, Simmat, Strelow and Gerd Winkler (with his television film *Null mal null = Kunst, 'Zero Times Zero = Art*). In this way these underground stirrings became a movement advancing towards its aim with confident steps.

Now they were determined to keep the name 'ZERO', although it only expressed a starting point, because this name indicated that it was possibly to constantly make a new start, and at the same time the name was to be a charm protecting them from the risk of becoming stuck in a rut. 'Until the present day ZERO has never been an established and settled group of artists, and certainly never a kind of club, and so it should remain. The participants have constantly changed, although the nucleus, consisting of Mack, Uecker and myself are its permanent members. This group was formed by people of a like mentality and preserves its continuous spiritual movement.' (Piene)

Meanwhile, groups similar to ZERO emerged in many countries. In the Netherlands the Informelle Gruppe changed direction and changed its name, taking the name Nul in line with ZERO's trends. In Milan Gruppo N and in Padua Gruppo

T were established. In Zagreb a Yugoslav group was founded, and in Paris Nouvelles tendences and Groupe recherche d 'Art visuel were established by Victor Vasarely and his son Jean-Pierre (Yvaral) and their circle. Other names that should be mentioned here are the kineticists around von Graeventz in Munich, the kinetic centre in Medalla, and Salvadori and Keeler in London.

V

What is the aim?

In October 1958 the theme of the Eighth Evening Exhibition, Vibration, was announced. In other words this was a new way of displaying space, and also meant opening new spaces. Jackson Pollock and Mark Tobey had opened new spaces for us by setting out from different starting points. Their paintings were described as 'informal', because they had no trace of geometric and static forms. But their real achievement was to discover a new form. This form was not divided into separate forms that could stand alone and represent only themselves; but they matched vibrating space with the plane of the painting, which was itself in a state of vibration, and became form without being the opposite of the forms that filled it.

The new generation of painters felt the need to re-depict this moving space, or rather 'continuity of space'. This new standpoint did not leave much possibility for finding links with the De Stijl masters and Constructivists. Only a short and late period of Mondrian's work, when he did his Boogie-Woogie paintings, interested them: *Broadway Boogie-Woogie* (it should be noted here that Mark Tobey made a painting with the same name in 1942) and *Victory Boogie-Woogie*. In these paintings Mondrian's static world system based on right angles and primary colors starts to move and is shaken by a dynamism that is reminiscent of dancing. It is very strange that Vasarely did not influence ZERO ... and nor did Fontana's naive and rational solution to the question of space, by including it in the painting in a realistic manner (like Alexander cutting the Gordion knot), exert much of an influence on them. Although their personal relations with Fontana gave impulse to their work, his paintings only confirmed the road that they had chosen. It was Yves Klein's 'Monochrome' gold and blue paintings that signaled the way. In one of his articles Piene expressed this in the following words: 'Yves Klein virtually forced us to accept the continuous color space that he showed us in all his innocence, as a space of vibration'. They also worked with light, believing that pictures should be created not by the artist but directly by light; and that the artist should keep as far away as possible from the process of creating the painting.

From now on their aim was expressed as follows: Painting whose field of power is demarcated by light energy. At the Eighth Evening Exhibition, Mack and Piene tried to express vibration not by static methods inherited from the past, but only by painting. Mack's white 'structure' pictures sometimes resembled seismograph records or the lines of an electrocardiogram; like Piene's first 'light reliefs' formed by grid designs. As yet there were still no moving objects.

In 1959, after getting to know Tinguely, it was decided to accept the movement of an engine as one of the main elements of pictorial art. The theme of the Antwerp exhibition, in which Tinguely participated, was Moholy-Nagy's 'Vision in Motion - Motion in Vision' discourse. At that time, ZERO turned towards moving art, adding that to its very long line of development. This extended far beyond the Bauhaus tradition represented by Ludwig Hirschfeld Mack, creator of the *Farbenklavier* (color piano), Kurt Schwerdtfeger and Josef Hartwig, as well as Moholy-Nagy.

VI

For the book entitled *Movens* published by Höllerer, Mon and de la Motte, Wolfgang Rambott prepared a chronology of kinetic art after 1900. The first entry was:

1900: First race for the Gordon Benett prize: Charron won the race with his 24 horsepower Panhard at a speed of 65.85 km per hour.

I will try to refresh memories of events by recalling the most important events in this chronology:

1909: Futurist Manifesto / 1915: Duchamp's *Bicycle Wheel*, made of manufactured materials / 1921: Abstract films by Hans Richter and Viking Eggeling; experiments at Bauhaus; Russian constructivists like Tatlin and El Lissitzky engage in art related partially to film (Eisenstein) and theatre (Meyerhold) / 1932: Calder's mobiles / 1955: First group exhibition at Galerie Denise René (Agam, Bury, Calder, Duchamp, Jacobsen, Soto, Tinguely, Vasarely).

1950/60: Heinz Mack established the first light dynamos / 1959: Otto Piene presented the 'archaic' form of his Light Ballet made of hand torches and folio at Galerie Schmela. The following year he developed the second and 'mechanical' stage, which was displayed three evenings running in association with the Festival for Light exhibition during the Ninth Evening Exhibition at his studio in Düsseldorf. At first several people represented the 'archaic light ballet' accompanied by jazz music, and then appliances and projectors took the place of players holding metal folios and torches. Light was filtered through pieces of 'programmed' revolving glass that were moved around by the artists or visitors / 1961: In the third stage, an 'automatic' light ballet was created, consisting of illuminated globes moved by a motor, in which light passed through holes in black covers over the globes, and shone on the walls and ceiling. At the end of the same year a classic Light Ballet show was given in the darkened rococo style hall of the Morsbroich Palace Museum in Leverkusen. For this display all the light ballet machines that had been made so far were brought together. The *Salon de Lumiere* idea was born of this, and from 1962 onwards all the Null and ZERO exhibitions became displays created by Mack, Piene and Uecker working as a team. Apart from Piene's 'Light Ballet', Mack's rotors and Uecker's moving disks embedded with nails were always shown at the exhibitions. After 1964 they created the 'Light Mills'.

Mack, Piene and Uecker's approach to questions about their joint works was this: 'Putting forward a number of ideas while several people are engaged in a task is more productive than the work of a single individual. Particularly in the case of an application, and if there is any link to architectural designs, cooperation and the exchange of ideas achieves very good results.' But these artists shared the view that teamwork in art was limited. Apart from these examples, they were each so preoccupied with their own ideas and projects that there was no risk of them devoting all their time to team projects and losing their own identities.

VII

For the exhibition in Krefeld in 1963, Anthony Thwaites wrote: 'Each of these three artists has a different style. Piene's vibrating white surfaces or twisting smoke, Mack's silver mirror surfaces or black and white structures, Uecker's white nail heads or dark vortices bear no resemblance in style to the works of

Malevich and Lissitzky or Mondrian and Doesburg, and cannot even be compared to the Tachists or today's action painters…'

Of these three artists Piene is the most philosophical, the one who thinks most deeply, and also the most romantic. That is why all of ZERO's activities, although born both of intellectual calculations and emotional impulses, carry one into a new world of romanticism, far from rational and technical considerations. Piene's smoke pictures remind us of glistening air on hot summer days, and his fire paintings open the doors to a world of unknown plants and animals. Of the three artists, Mack is the most interested in experiments, in technique, and in the way technique is reflected in the laws of structure. While Piene is interested in new human forms of experience, he looks at new technical possibilities. But these differences in their aims should not be dwelt upon at length, since they are not sharply revealed in their work. The difference between the ZERO artists is not in their aims, but rather in the conclusions they draw. This needs another article to be discussed thoroughly.

Uecker is the least keen on writing, the one who behaves most like an artist, who is most inclined to use artificial materials, and perhaps the truest artist of them all. His nail pictures recall tree canopies fluttering in the wind, fields of wheat in which the passing wind leaves traces, or the movement of waves on the sea. At the same time they resemble the magnetic field shown by iron filings, or mold spreading on wood. Uecker is more successful than other artists at making viewers forget the original materials of which his works are made. They do not even notice the nails in his works. Looking at Uecker's nail pictures it is possible to follow his development, seeing how he moved from informal art through rigid works, and slowly made the transition to organic moving forms.

The way all three artists were accepted in America was unequivocal, in a way that is hardly imaginable. Critics define ZERO as a movement that gained international importance following expressionism and the Bauhaus period; originating in Germany and spreading to other countries. This is a major discourse. Other German artists who emerged after the war and gained acceptance chose a unique path for themselves and walked along it (Bissier and Schulze, Schumacher and Sonderborg, Kricke and Meier Denninghoff). Will the ZERO artists one day achieve the same level as the Brücke (Bridge) artists, Beckmann, or the Bauhaus artists?

Americans unhesitatingly answer 'yes' to this question. But we who live in Europe cannot make such a judgment without thinking hard. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that the time has come for us to examine their works more closely than has been done before.

VIII

Does the future belong to art created without suffering pain? Being human without living tragically, not to suffer the pain of art – is this possible? Probably it is not. Human beings will always seek to express themselves in the darkness of the soul. But an area free of tragedy is not inconceivable. An area where pain is silent, a ZERO area.



group ZERO
otto piene

Group ZERO is not a definitely organized group. When in the middle of the fifties the younger artists in Düsseldorf became increasingly active, no gallery proved to be willing or able to take a real interest in their work and ideas. Thus, some artists found a solution for their practical problems by organizing what we called 'evening exhibitions,' which consisted only of an opening night, and did not continue further than that night.

The first exhibition following a certain theme was the Seventh Evening Exhibition entitled 'The Red Painting' (the dominant color of the paintings was red). Encouraged by the publicity raised by the previous events, we (Mack and I) published a catalog-magazine called *ZERO* (*ZERO 1*, April 1958). It contained articles written by several critics and artists taking part in the exhibition. The main tendency was cleansing the color from the traces of Art Informel and Neo-Expressionism, in other words the peaceful conquest of the soul through sensitization. The leading articles in the catalog came from Yves Klein, Heinz Mack, and myself. Yves wrote about monochrome painting, Mack about vibration, and my essay was concerned with my view of color as an articulation of light.

The title *ZERO* was the result of months of search and was finally found more or less by chance. From the beginning we looked upon the term not as an expression of nihilism or a Dada-like gag, but as a word indicating a zone of silence and new possibilities –like the countdown when rockets take off. ZERO is the incommensurable zone in which an old stance merges into an unknown new.

More important than *ZERO 1* may have been *ZERO 2* (October 1958). It was published on the occasion of the Eighth Evening Exhibition titled the 'Vibration.' The show consisted of the works of five artists, whose works were mainly devoted to the theme of visual motion: Oskar Holweck, Heinz Mack, Almir Mavignier, Otto Piene, and Adolf Zillmann. In *ZERO* 2, Mack's essay and mine have the serious character of manifestos: Mack was concerned with 'Quiet and Unquiet' and I with 'Purity of Light.' Fritz Seitz wrote a thorough introduction to our problems.

One reason for the formation of the group was also the meeting of artists with similar ideas, a meeting where the artistic imagination of individual artists from different parts of Germany (and -after some time- from all over the world) came into contact with each other. Another reason was my friendship with Mack and

ero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die

our common human and artistic interests, which became apparent in his dynamic structures and my light-pattern paintings.

After the 'Vibration' exhibition we met many artists who were concerned with similar problems. Most important proved to be our contact with Lucio Fontana, whom we have looked upon since our first personal meetings as kind of a spiritual father, although he did not influence us directly.

I met Fontana for the first time in 1961. But Mack had often seen him before. Piero Manzoni, who since 1959 had established many contacts between artists in different countries –especially in Milan and Düsseldorf– had introduced him to Fontana. We were very impressed by his winning personality.

Max Bill, who in 1960 included us in his show 'Concrete Art' provided another 'temptation.' But most of us (except Mavignier, who had been a student of Bill's) succeeded in standing on our own feet as artists, who do not want their spirits (and sensations) to be blinded by Reason or distracted by one-sided intellectualistic attitudes in seeing and thinking– by making 'visual research' their sole interest. One of our most important aims proved to be the attempt to re-harmonize the relationship between man and nature –nature offers enormous impulses from the elements, i.e. the sky, the sea, the Arctic, the deserts, air, light, water, fire as means of expression and form; the artist is not a fugitive from the 'modern world', no, he uses new technical tools as well as the forces of nature.

The relationship between nature, man, and technology was one of the leading themes of *ZERO 3* published in July 1961. It included around twenty artists: the essays paying tribute to Fontana and the comments by or on Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, Arman, Spoerri, Mack, and myself may have been most influential.

Yves Klein may have been the real influence in the formation of the ZERO group. His friendship, his suggestive personality and his artistic power may have lead us in 1957 toward ZERO, even if our individual tendency to see light and visual movement as 'vibrations' and as the struggle between light and darkness had only a loose connection with his ideas. His influence, however, stemmed from his personal genius and his attitude towards 'Purification'.

Perhaps the most important ZERO exhibition took place at the Hessenhuis in Antwerp in March 1959. It was organized by Pol Bury, Paul van Hoeydonck, and Jean Tinguely, assisted by Daniel Spoerri. The exhibition had no title, but the theme of the catalog was the Moholy-Nagy term 'vision in motion - motion in vision.' Some of the participants were Bury, van Hoeydonck, Yves Klein, Mack, Munari, Piene, Uecker, Soto, Tinguely.

In July 1959, together with Mack, I organized another exhibition of that type in Wiesbaden, entitled 'Dynamo 1'. It opened the night before the start of documenta II and became the first of our exhibitions in Germany, provoked by the customary views on Tachism and the like. It gave an impression of the possibility for harmony between sensations and mental control.

Since the beginning of 1959, Mack and I had repeated meetings with Jean Tinguely, whose rousing talks encouraged our activities and gave us the impetus to motorize our light-objects. From 1959 on we worked toward the compilation and publication of *ZERO 3*. After it came out, an ever increasing number of ZERO 'happenings' and exhibitions took place, mostly organized by Mack and myself, sometimes in Italy by Manzoni and Castellani, or in Holland (as of 1961 the Dutch Informel group changed its direction and approached ZERO), by Peeters and Armando (who in 1962 fixed a new name for their group – 'Nul' or ZERO).

Peeters was one of the organizers of the 'Nul' exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam in March 1962.

Around 1960, two tendencies had developed among the artists who had taken part or had been interested in ZERO events: the idealistic (occasionally romantic) trend, which is directed to the idea of transformation from darkness to light (later formulized in 'ZERO, the new idealism,' the poetic manifesto of Mack, Piene, Uecker in Berlin and Brussels) –and new realistic trend (Nouveau réalisme) of Yves Klein, Tinguely, Arman, Spoerri- in some ways parallel to Pop Art in America.

By that time (around 1961-62), many other groups were founded, especially in Europe, which felt either an attraction to or hate for ZERO, such as the Yugoslav group in Zagreb, Gruppo N and Gruppo T in Milan and Padua, the Groupe des recherches d'art visuel in Paris (which also comes from the Vasarely line), the Academic Kineticists in Munich (with their ambitious foreman von Graevenitz), and Nouvelles tendances, the 'kinetic center' of Medalla and Salvadori in London.

Since the end of 1961, Uecker had been working closely with Mack and myself, and in 1962 the result of our first collaboration was presented: the 'Salon de lumière' in the Stedelijk Museum. Since that time, along with the ZERO exhibitions at various places, we have had several exhibitions together: in Brussels (Palais des Beaux Arts); in Krefeld (Museum Haus Lange); in Berlin; in The Hague (Gemeentemuseum); in London (McRoberts and Tunnard); at documenta III. Mack's and Uecker's work today is more concerned with light itself, while I try to penetrate darkness by means of smoke and fire on the one hand and projectors on the other. While Mack longs to alter vast landscapes, I try to influence the 'human landscape' by the Light-Ballet and my plays.

Mack, Uecker, and I now form, let's say, the 'inner circle' of ZERO (which, I repeat, is not a definitely organized group). There is no president, no leader, no secretary; there are no 'members,' there is only a human relationship among several artists and an artistic relationship among different individuals. The partners in ZERO exhibitions always change. There is no obligation to take part, the words 'should' or 'must' are not uttered (one of the reasons, I think, why ZERO is still growing). We are fond of collaborating and occasionally doing teamwork (Mack, Piene, Uecker: *Light Mills*), but we are at the same time convinced that teamwork is nonsense if it tries to be an alternative to or rules out individuality or personal sensibility. For me the essence of teamwork is the chance to produce a synthesis of different personal ideas. This synthesis may be richer than the few ideas a single artist will usually be able to investigate.

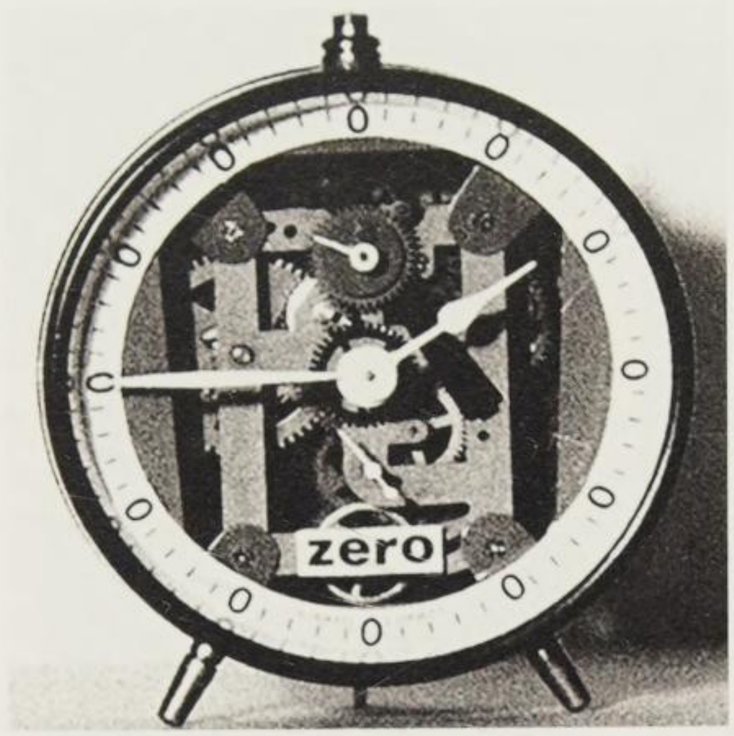
We try to remain faithful to our concept of giving more beauty to 'the world' without destroying our spirit by the fixed terms of a program and believing that we might be the alpha and the omega. We try to work in our ZERO zone and at the same time remain open to the ZERO zones which 'the world,' man and nature constantly offer us.

Published in *The Times Literary Supplement*, London, September 3, 1964.

vache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frü



Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero



chronology
thekla zell

1957

25 March Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands signed the Treaty of Rome, which created the European Economic Community. **15 September** Konrad Adenauer was re-elected as the prime minister of the Federal Republic of Germany. **4 October** The Soviet satellite Sputnik 1 was successfully launched into orbit around the earth, marking the beginning of space travel.

DÜSSELDORF
'Evening Exhibition'
Studio Otto Piene
Gladbacher Str. 69
11 April 1957

Heinz Mack and Otto Piene began to organize exhibitions lasting just one evening in their own studios at regular intervals. Mack and Piene rented the 'derelict studios' at the back of a house in Düsseldorf that had been damaged during the war, and used them as an exhibition space for a single evening. The first of a total of nine 'evening exhibitions' consisted of works by artists including Hans Joachim Bleckert, Peter Brüning, Horst Egon Kalinowski, Herbert Kaufmann, Hans Salentin and Gerhard Wind, who were members of Group 53, an association of artists from Düsseldorf. The exhibits also included works by Mack and Piene, who belonged to the group for a time. This unorthodox concept quickly led to the evening exhibitions becoming a meeting place for friends, artists, collectors, gallery owners, journalists and art lovers.

PARIS
Yves Klein, 'Propositions monochromes,'
Iris Clert Gallery
10–25 May 1957

This exhibition presented monochrome works by Yves Klein that had earlier been exhibited under the title 'Yves Klein. Proposte monochrome, epoca blu' at Galleria Apollinaire (2–12 January 1957) in Milan. At the opening, Yves Klein and his guests walked in procession from the gallery to the Place Saint-Germain-des-Prés, where they released hundreds of blue balloons into the sky, calling this an 'aerostatic sculpture'. On the same date a comprehensive exhibition of the artists' works was held at the Galerie Collette Allendy in Paris. Klein presented his first 'immaterial' work on the first floor of the gallery: an empty space that testifies to the presence of pictorial sensibility.

DÜSSELDORF
Yves Klein, 'Proportions monochromes',
Schmela Gallery
31 May–23 June 1957

Alfred Schmela marked the opening of his gallery in Düsseldorf with the solo exhibition of Yves Klein's work. In subsequent years Schmela became the foremost patron of the ZERO artists, enabling them to hold their first exhibitions in Germany.



1



2



3



5



4



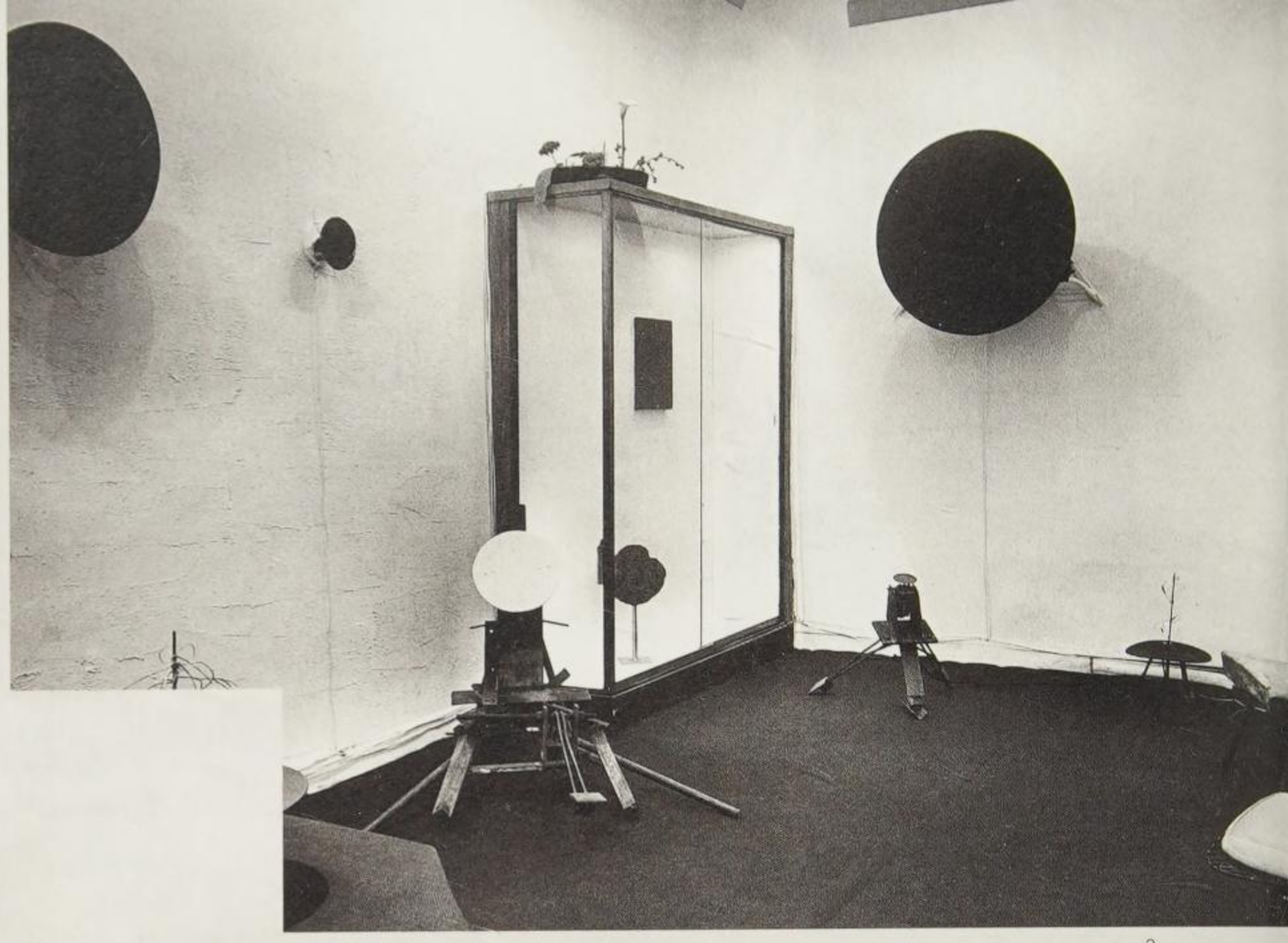
6

1957 **1** Workshop at Gladbacher Str. 69, Düsseldorf. **2** 4th Evening Exhibition, workshop of Otto Piene, Gladbacher Str. 69. **3** Yves Klein, Alfred Schmela, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf. **4** Yves Klein, 'Propositions Monochromes', Iris Clert Gallery, Paris, 1957. **5** 4th Evening Exhibition, workshop of Otto Piene, Gladbacher Str. 69. **6** Otto Piene, Yves Klein, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.

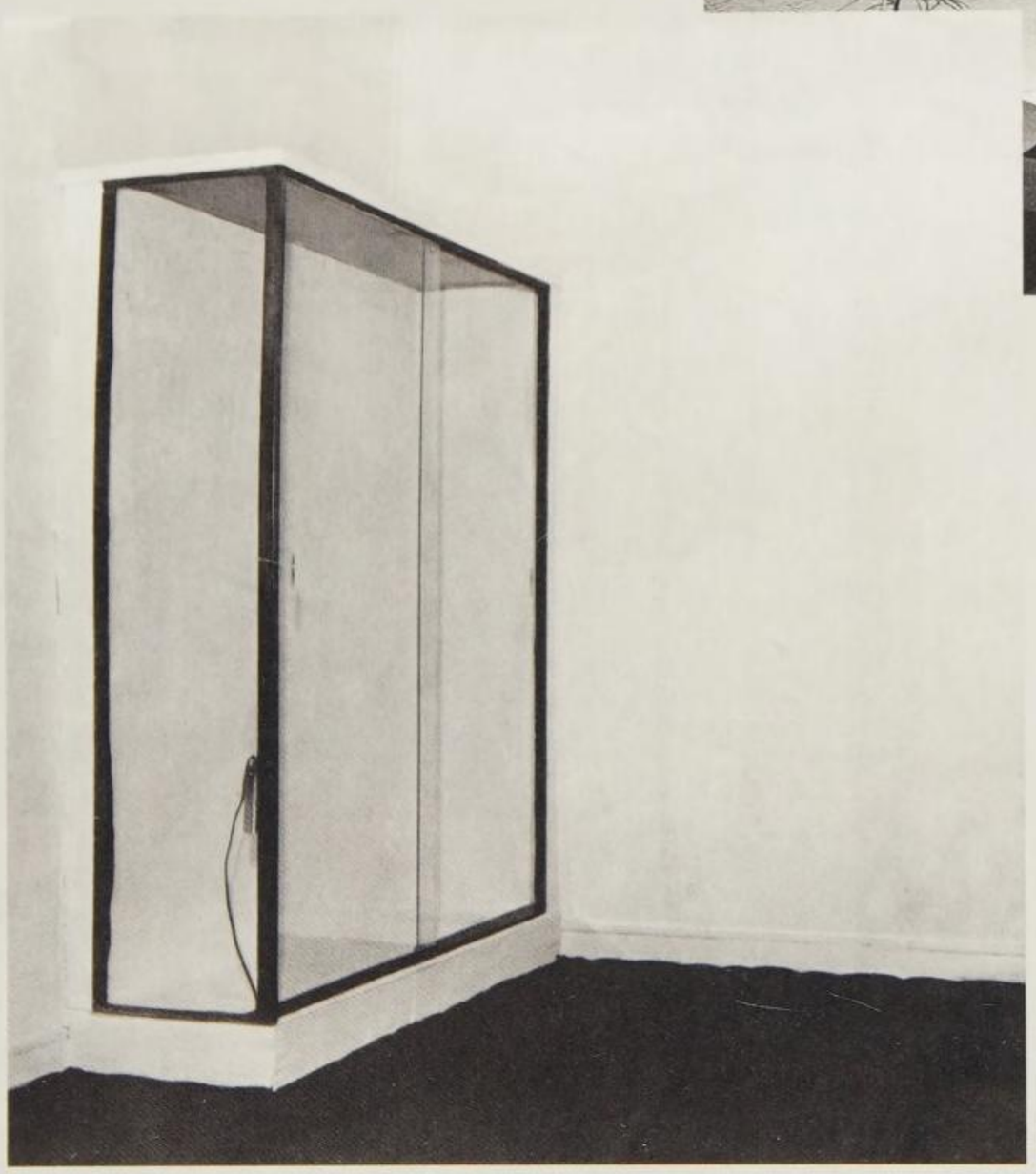
ist Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der



1



2



3

Iris Clert vous convie à honorer, de toute votre présence affective, l'avènement lucide et positif d'un certain règne du sensible. Cette manifestation de synthèse perceptive sanctionne chez Yves Klein la quête picturale d'une émotion extatique et immédiatement communicable. (vernissage, 3, rue des beaux-arts, le lundi 28 avril de 21 h. à 24 heures). Pierre Restany

4

8. ABENDAUSSTELLUNG

WIR ERLAUBEN UNS, SIE ZUR 8. ABENDAUSSTELLUNG

VIBRATION ERGEBENST EINZULADEN

ZUR EINFÜHRUNG SPRICHT FRITZ SEITZ STUTTGART

DONNERSTAG, 2. OKTOBER 1958, 20 UHR, IN DÜSSELDORF, GLADBACHER STR. 69

ZUR AUSSTELLUNG ERSCHEINT DIE ZWEITE NUMMER DER ZEITSCHRIFT ZERO

OSKAR HOLWECK
HEINZ MACK
ALMIR MAVIGNIER
OTTO PIENE
ADOLF ZILLMANN

5

vernissage le 17 novembre 1958 à 21 heures

3 rue des beaux-arts danton 44.76

vitesse pure

et

stabilité monochrome

par

iris clert

yves klein

et

tinguely

6

1958 **1** *ZERO* magazine, no. 1, cover. **2** 'Vitesse Pure et Stabilité Monochrome', Yves Klein and Tinguely, Iris Clert Gallery. **3** Yves Klein's exhibition 'Le vide', Iris Clert Gallery, Paris. **4** Invitation for the 'Yves Klein' exhibition, Iris Clert Gallery. **5** Invitation for the 8. Evening Exhibition. **6** Invitation for the Yves Klein and Tinguely exhibition, Iris Clert Galllery.

Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nac

DÜSSELDORF
'4th Evening Exhibition'
Studio Otto Piene
Gladbacher Str. 69
26 September 1957

The 4th Evening Exhibition organized by Heinz Mack and Otto Piene was defined as 'the first exhibition to embody the Zero spirit (*Zero-Geist*)'. Here for the first time Piene exhibited a series of 'grid pictures'. After the exhibition held at Fatty's Atelier, the bar where the Düsseldorf artists congregated, Mack and Piene coined the name Zero together with Peter Brüning and Hans Salentin, who had also participated in the exhibition. They decided to give this name to the magazine that they planned to publish together.

MILAN
'Arte Nucleare'
San Fedele Gallery
12–30 October 1957

At the group exhibition organized by members of the Italian art movement, Arte Nucleare, works by Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni were shown together for the first time. Shortly after the exhibition Arte Nucleare issued a manifesto (Milan, September 1957) entitled 'Contro lo stile', which bore the signature of many international artists. The artists demanded an end to painting in a specific style, arguing for a new painting that was independent of conventional art and traditional rules.

1958

1 February After the Soviet Union had successfully launched the Sputnik 1 and Sputnik 2 satellites into space, the United States followed with Explorer 1. **17 April** The first world's fair after the Second World War opened in Brussels. The symbol of Expo 58, whose official theme was 'Technology for the Benefit of Humanity – Development of Humanity Through the Development of Technology', was the Atomium sculpture representing the atomic age. This sculpture by the Belgian engineer André Waterkeyn was over 100 meters in height. **4 June** Opening of the 29th Venice Biennale. Spanish artist Eduardo Chillida was awarded the Grand Prize for Sculpture. **29 July** The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was established in the United States. **5 September** The Association of Düsseldorf Artists enabled an overview of the former avant-garde art movement at the DADA exhibition.

DÜSSELDORF
'7th Evening Exhibition' – 'Red Painting'
Studio Heinz Mack & Otto Piene
Gladbacher Str. 69
ZERO 1
24 April 1958

At the 7th Evening Exhibition, entitled 'The Red Painting', numerous works in which red was the dominant color were shown. Among the 45 participating artists were Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, Hermann Bartels, Konrad Klapheck, Hans Salentin and, for the first time, Günther Uecker. After his exhibition at Galerie Schmela Yves Klein was invited to participate by Mack and Piene, and he showed a single work. In the first issue of *ZERO* magazine, Mack and Piene discussed the subject of colour, in accordance with the theme of the exhibition.

PARIS
'La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état de matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée – Le vide'
Iris Clert Gallery
28 April–12 May 1958

The exhibition of Yves Klein titled 'Le Vide' (The Void) was shown in an almost empty, whitewashed gallery room. Since the windows were painted over, the interior was invisible from the outside. Visitors passed beneath a baldachin to reach the entrance, which was closed by a blue curtain. Guards dressed in Republican uniforms stood at the entrance. Only ten visitors were admitted at a time and were only allowed to stay in the empty space for 2-3 minutes. They were offered blue cocktails.

DÜSSELDORF
'8th Evening Exhibition' – 'Vibration'
Atelier Heinz Mack and Otto Piene
Gladbacher Str. 69
ZERO 2
2 October 1958

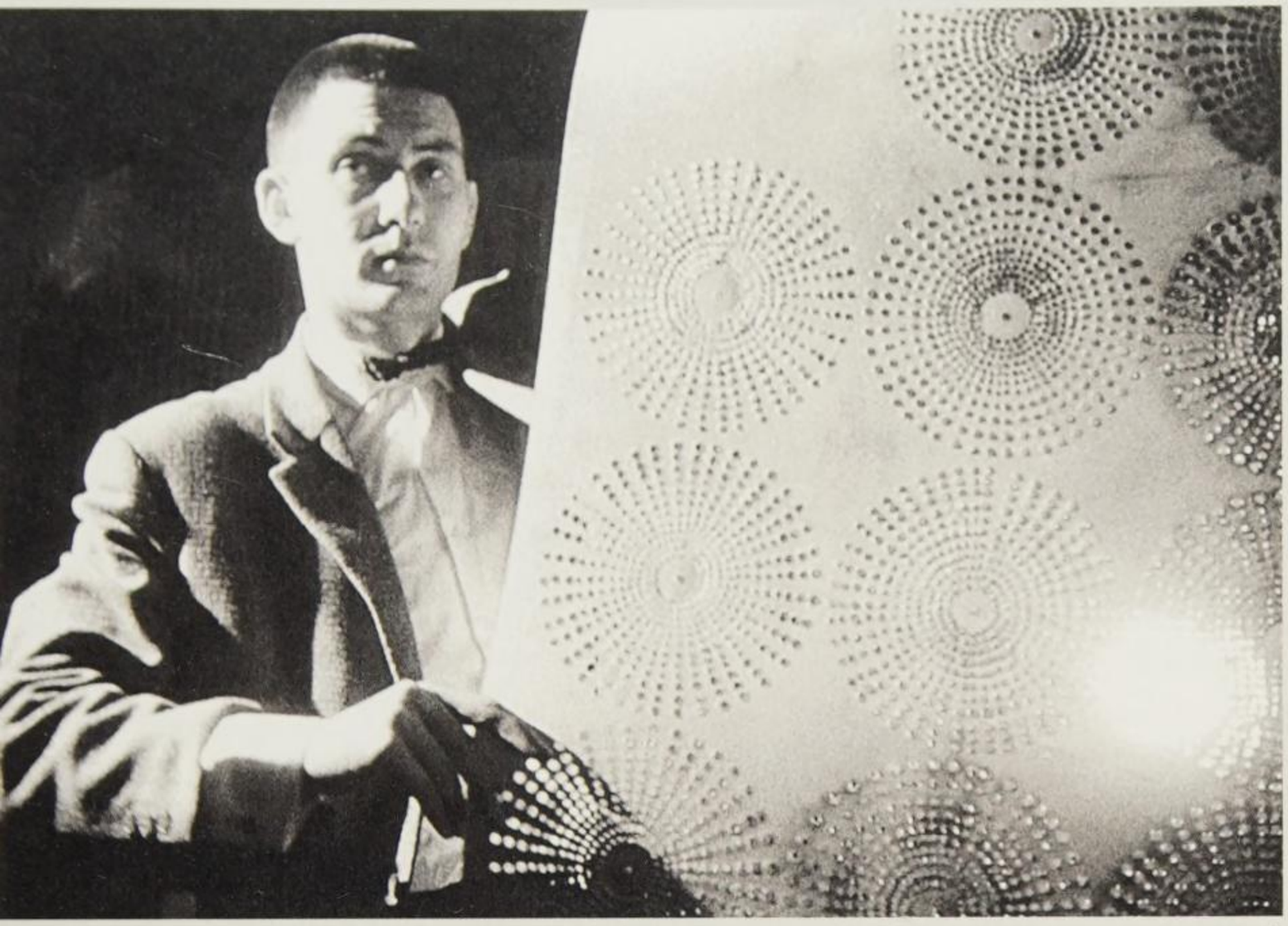
The 8th Evening Exhibition consisted of works on the themes of 'grid' and 'vibration' by Oskar Holweck, Heinz Mack, Almir Mavignier, Otto Piene and Adolf Zillmann. Works shaped from aluminum foil by Heinz Mack, who called them 'light reliefs', were shown here for the first time. This exhibition made it clear from the start that the era when informalism dominated the evening exhibitions was over, replaced by an era when the 'grid' paintings that were so important for ZERO were now focusing on subjects like structure, light and movement. For this exhibition, Mack and Piene published the second issue of *ZERO* magazine.

PARIS
'Vitesse Pure et Stabilité Monochrome par Yves Klein et Tinguely'
Iris Clert Gallery
17 November 1958

The Iris Clert gallery exhibited the latest collaborative works by Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely. Among these were monochrome discs turned by small electric motors. Shortly before this, Klein and Tinguely had shown the works to Heinz Mack, who visited Tinguely's studio.

1959

8 January Charles de Gaulle became president of France. **11 July** documenta II opened in Kassel. This event organized by Arnold Bode was dominated by the informalist and abstract expressionist movements. Carl Schweicher organized an exhibition of work by young German painters who belonged to the Kassel Society of Artists, and this exhibition included works by Heinz Mack and Otto Piene. **13 September** The Soviet Union's Lunik 2 became the first spacecraft to land on the moon. **10 October** Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani, Gianni Colombo and Gabriele Devecchi formed the 'Gruppo T' group in Milan. **21 October** The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum designed by Frank Lloyd Wright opened in New York. **November:** Alberto Biasi, Ennio Chiggio, Toni Costa, Eduardo Landi and Manfredo Massironi formed 'Gruppo Enne (N)' in Padua.



1

GALERIE RENATE BOUKES WIESBADEN BISMARCKRING 28 · 10. JULI - 7. AUGUST 1959

dynamo 1

EINLADUNG ZUR ERÖFFNUNG AM FREITAG, 10. JULI, 20ʰ · ES SPRICHT FRITZ SEITZ
DIE GALERIE IST WOCHENTAGS VON 10 - 13ʰ UND 16 - 19ʰ GEÖFFNET

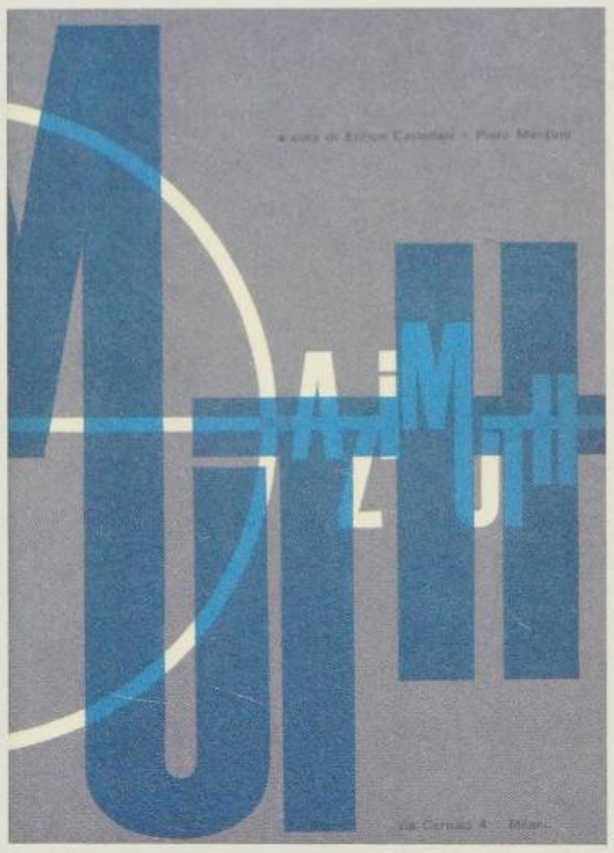
2



3

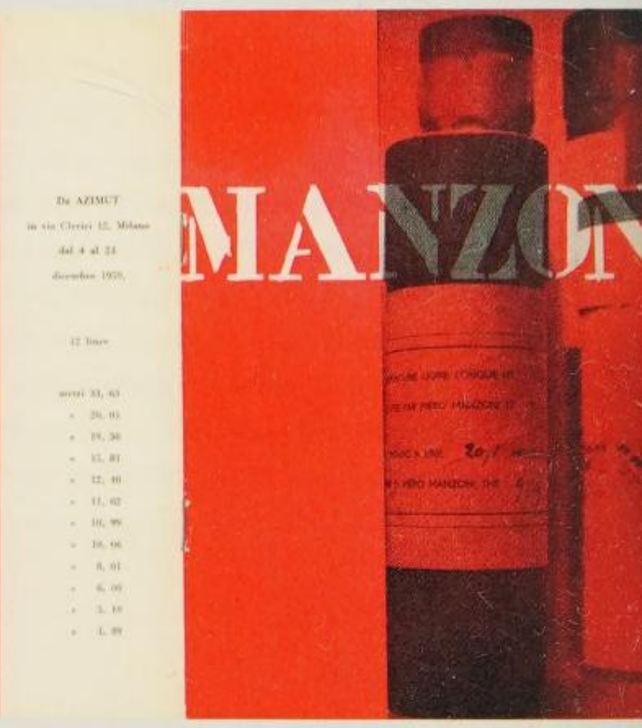


4



5





6



7



8

1959 **1** Otto Piene at the performance of his *Light Ballett*, Renate Boukes Gallery, Wiesbaden. **2** Invitation for the 'Dynamo 1' exhibition. **3** Jean Tinguely throwing leaflets out of the airplane, Düsseldorf, 1959. **4** Invitation for the 'Vision in Motion-Motion in Vision" exhibition, Milan. **5** *Azimuth* magazine, no. 1, cover. **6** Invitation for the 'Manzoni – 12 Linee' exhibition, Azimuth Gallery. **7** Magret Mack, Heinz Mack, Jean Tinguely, Daniel Spoerri, Pol Bury, Yves Klein, Emmett Williams after the opening at the Hessenhuis-Antwerp. **8** Jean Tinguely during performance with Daniel Spoerri, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.

Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero,

DÜSSELDORF
'Tinguely'
Schmela Gallery
30 January–18 February 1959

Yves Klein opened Jean Tinguely's first solo exhibition in Germany with a talk on 'Cooperation Between Creative Artists'. In honour of Klein and Tinguely, Günther Uecker organized a fancy dress ball on the theme of 'Exuberance in Colours', which went on for several days at his studio in Düsseldorf. Otto Piene and Günther Uecker met for the first time. Soon after the exhibition closed, Tinguely scattered copies of his manifesto 'For Static' from the window of a downtown building in Düsseldorf.

ANTWERP
Untitled ('Vision in Motion – Motion in Vision')
G 58 Hessenhuis
21 March–3 May 1959

The Belgian group of artists, G58, organized an exhibition in the penthouse of a historic house in Antwerp. Works by Robert Breer, Pol Bury, Yves Klein, Heinz Mack, Bruno Munan, Otto Piene, Dieter Roth, Jesus Rafael Soto, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely, Günther Uecker and Paul Van Hoeydonck were here shown together for the first time.

WIESBADEN
'Dynamo 1'
Renate Boukes Gallery
10 July–7 August 1959

Heinz Mack and Otto Piene organized a group exhibition based on the 8th Evening Exhibition and the 'Vision in Motion - Motion in Vision' exhibition in Antwerp. This exhibition was deliberately opened on a date close to that of documenta II. Mack and Piene invited Piero Manzoni, whom they had met a short time before, to participate in the exhibition. Together with 'Dynamo 1' and 'Vision in Motion – Motion in Vision', this became the exhibition that best displayed the international face of the ZERO movement.

MILAN
Azimuth 1
3 September 1959

Enrico Castellani and Piero Manzoni published the first issue of *Azimuth* magazine, which reported on the latest developments in contemporary art and enabled international artists, writers and critics to express their views. There were also specially designed pages, such as Yves Klein's 'monochrome blue' pages and Manzoni's 'Alphabet'.

MILAN
Manzoni – 12 Linee
Azimuth Gallery
4–12 December 1959

Milan's Galleria Azimuth, which was run by Enrico Castellani and Manzoni, exhibited the works of Piero Manzoni at the gallery opening. Agostino Bonalumi, Lucio Fontana, the architect Franco Buzzi and Gillo Dorfles also participated in the gallery project. During its brief life in print, *Azimuth* became Italy's foremost platform for artists associated with the ZERO group.

GELSENKIRCHEN
Opening of the Musiktheater Gelsenkirchen
15 December 1959

Architect Werner Ruhnau headed the team that established the Musiktheater in Gelsenkirchen. As well as Robert Adams, Paul Dierkes and Norbert Kricke, Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely were involved in designing the interior of the theatre.

1960

1 January Eastern Cameroon's independence from France marked the beginning of the end of colonial rule in Africa. **1 April** The United States of America launched Tiros 1, the first satellite to collect weather data and take photographs of the world from space. **16 May** Physicist Theodore Maiman made the first successful working laser. **18 June** Opening of the 30th Venice Biennale. A year later, in protest at the biennale's conservative programme, the artist Almir Mavignier organized an exhibition in Zagreb called 'Nove Tmndencije' (New Trends). Artists associated with the ZERO group took part in the exhibition. **27 October** The Nouveaux Realistes group was established in Paris. Pierre Restany wrote the founding manifesto for the group, and this was signed by Arman François Dufrêne, Raimond Hains, Yves Klein, Martial Raysse, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely and Jaques de la Villegle. **8 November** John F. Kennedy was elected president of the United States of America.

MILAN
'La nuova concezione artistica'
Azimuth Gallery
Azimuth 2
4 January–1 February 1960

The group exhibition entitled 'La nuova concezione artistica' (New Artistic Concepts) included works by its organizers Enrico Castellani and Pierro Manzoni, and by Oskar Holweck, Yves Klein, Mack and Almir Mavignier, who had participated in the Evening Exhibitions organized by Heinz Mack and Otto Piene. The second and last issue of *Azimut* magazine contained articles in English, German and French, as well as pictures of works in the exhibition and a photograph of Piene's *Light Ballet*.

BERN
'Internationale Avant-garde 1960'
Kleintheater
28 January–8 February 1960

Swiss artist Christian Megert and gallery owner Georges Kasper opened the first avant-garde art exhibition at the Kleintheater in Bern. Among the 25 artists who participated in the exhibition were Agostino Bonalumi, Enrico Castellani, Lucio Fontana and Piero Manzoni from the ZERO group. The numerous exhibitions organized by Megert in Bern increasingly focused on ZERO. In 1962 he and gallery owner Schindler, also from Bern, organized a major ZERO exhibition.

DÜSSELDORF
'Lucio Fontana'
Schmela Gallery
20 January 1960

Otto Piene gave the opening speech at Lucio Fontana's first solo show in Germany. Two years later Otto Piene again gave the opening speech at an exhibition of Fontana's work at Museum Schloss Morsbroich in Leverkusen.

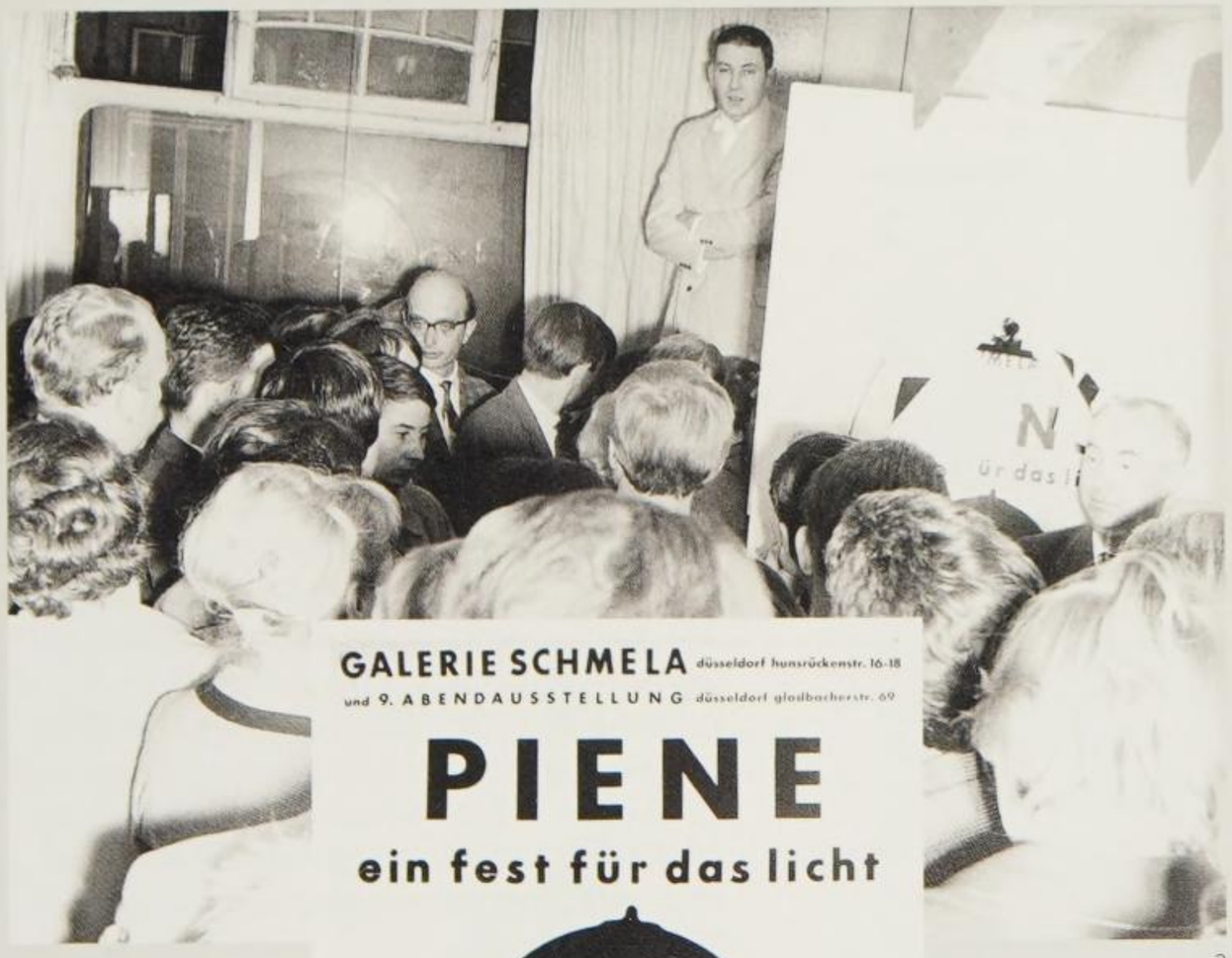
ero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feue



1



2



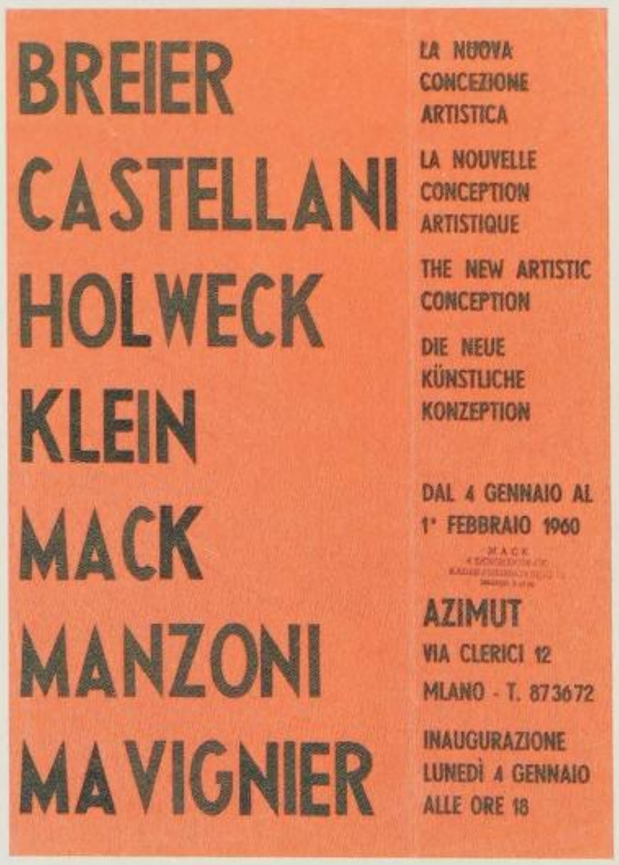
3



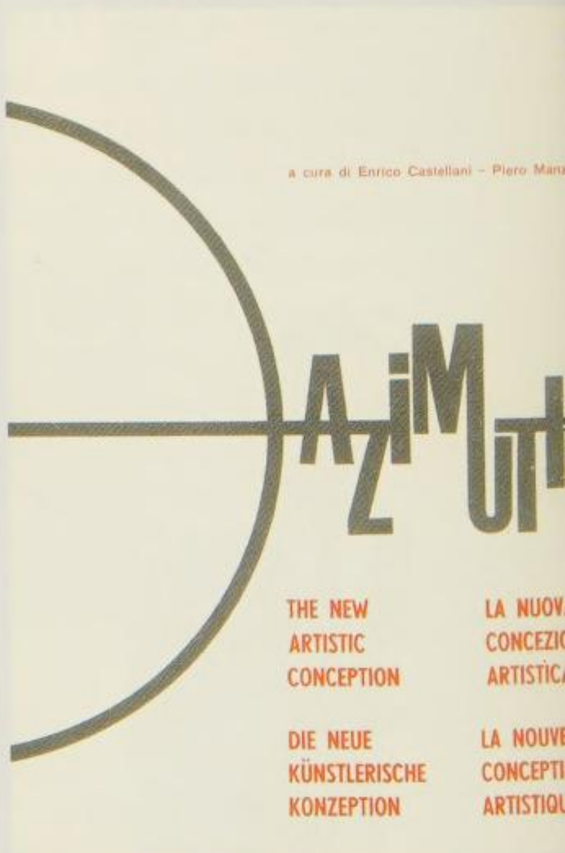
4



5



6



7

1960 **1** Invitation for the 'Fontana' exhibition, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf. **2** Lucio Fontana and Alfred Schmela, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf. **3** Otto Piene, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf. **4** Rof Leuzinger, Christian Megert, 'Internationale Avant-garde 1960', Kleintheater, Bern. **5** Invitation for the 9th Evening Exhibition, Schmela Gallery. **6** Invitation for the 'New Artistic Conception' exhibition, Azimuth Gallery, Milan. **7** *Azimuth* magazine, no. 2, cover.

Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3

DÜSSELDORF
'Piene – Light Festival'
Schmela Gallery
'9th Evening Exhibition'
Studio Otto Piene
Gladbacher Strasse 69
7–15 October 1960

Otto Piene exhibited his smoke and light paintings and projected images at Galerie Schmela. Meanwhile the 9th Evening Exhibition, comprising three evening exhibitions organized by Piene, opened on 10 October at Gladbacher Strasse 69. This exhibition, which included his chromatic and electronic *Light Ballet*, was the last official show in the series.

1961

12 April Soviet astronaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man to orbit the world, in the Vostok spacecraft. **27 May** Biochemists Heinrich Matthei and Marshall Warren Nirenberg succeeded in deciphering the genetic code. **28 May** The human rights commission Amnesty was founded in London. **13 August** The East German Republic began building the Berlin Wall. **30 October** The Federal German Republic decided to sign an agreement with Turkey to bring Turkish workers to Germany, following similar agreements signed with Italy, Spain and Greece.

KREFELD
'Yves Klein – Monochrome und Feuer'
Museum Haus Lange
14 January–26 February 1961

Paul Wember, director of the Krefeld Museum, held a major exhibition consisting of 50 works by Yves Klein. As well as paintings like *Monogold, Cosmogonies, Anthropométries* and sculptures, the exhibition included several of Klein's architectural designs, as well as an *Immaterieller Raum*. On the evening of the opening, 'fire paintings' were realized in the garden of the Krefeld Museum.

ROME
'Mack + Klein + Piene + Uecker + Lo Savio = 0'
La Salita Gallery
15 June 1961

La Salita in Rome was dedicated to showing contemporary art. As well as group exhibitions by Heinz Mack, Yves Klein, Francesco Lo Savio, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker, solo exhibitions by Gianni Colombo, Otto Piene and Yves Klein were held here.

DÜSSELDORF
'ZERO – Edition, Exposition Demonstration'
Schmela Gallery
ZERO 3
5 July 1961

The third and last issue of *ZERO* magazine was published for this exhibition, which was designed jointly by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker. Over thirty avant-garde artists contributed articles and visual material to this issue. Publication of the magazine was celebrated that evening by a large-scale ZERO festival inside and in front of the gallery. Günther Uecker actively participated in a ZERO event for the first time. Uecker took a brush and white paint and marked out an area of the street in front of the gallery that he called *Weisse Zone ZERO* (White Zone ZERO).

1962

20 February American astronaut John Glenn orbited the world for the first time. **18 March** The war between Algeria and France, which had been going on since 1954, came to an end, and on 5 July Algeria declared its independence. **16 April** George Pompidou became the new president of France. **6 June** Yves Klein died in Paris at the age of 34. **10 July** The first radio and television satellite 'Telstar 1' was launched into space by the United States of America. The first live television pictures were relayed to Europe. **16 October** The 31st Venice Biennale opened. The grand prize for sculpture was awarded to the Italian sculptor Alberto Giacometti and the grand prize for painting to the French artist Alfred Manessier. **22 October** With the outbreak of the Cuban crisis, tension escalated between the Soviet Union and the United States of America.

LEVERKUSEN
Lucio Fontana – 'Werke aus 3 Jahrzehnten' (Works over Three Decades)
Staedtisches Museum Schloss Morsbroich
12 January–25 February 1962

Lucio Fontana's first exhibition in Germany opened at the Leverkusen city museum. Otto Piene gave the opening speech for the exhibition and a small exhibition of Piene's work entitled *Otto Piene –Licht und Rauch, Graphik* (Otto Piene – Light and Smoke, Graphic) was organized simultaneously. The artist's *Light Ballet* was also shown.

AMSTERDAM
'Nul' [Nul 62]
Stedelijk Museum
9–26 March 1962

Amsterdam City Museum director Willem Sandberg held a comprehensive ZERO exhibition that was the most important artistic show of ZERO's early years.

As well as solo works by the participating artists, complex spatial installations like *Salon de Lumiere* (Light Room) by Mack, Piene and Uecker were shown at the exhibition.

GHENT
'Forum '62'
Centrum voor Kunstambachten
Gewezen St. Pietersabdij
6 May–3 June 1962

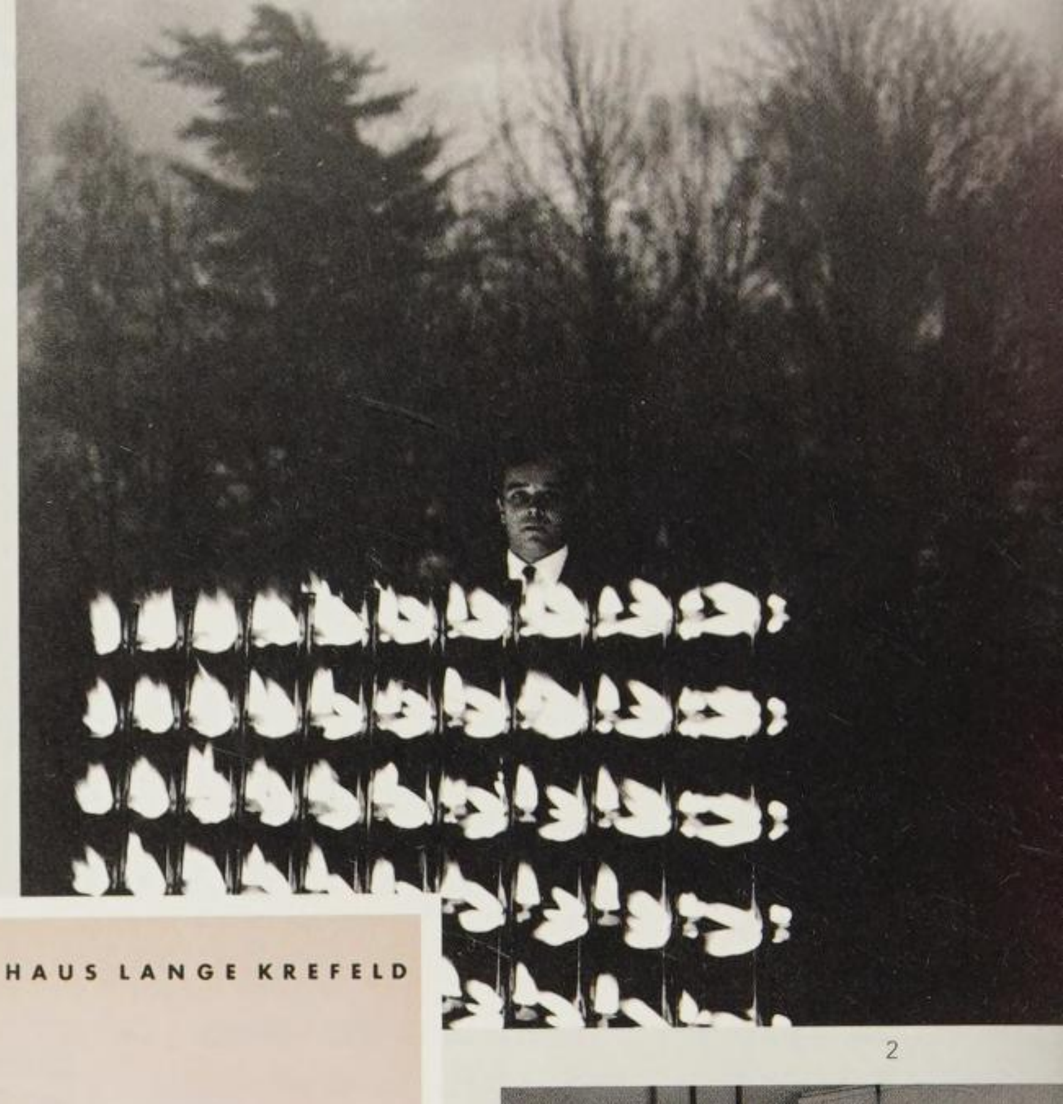
'Forum '62' arose from a joint initiative by the poet Paul de Vree and Karel Geirland to contribute to awareness of modern and contemporary art in Belgium and encourage exhibitions of such art. The exhibition was divided into two parts: one consisting of works by artists representing abstract expressionism and informalism, and the other works by ZERO artists. Mack was responsible for exhibiting the ZERO works. Emulating the 'Vision in Motion – Motion in Vision' exhibition (Antwerp, 1959), the works were arranged freely within the space.

DÜSSELDORF
'Ohne Titel' (Untitled)
(ZERO –Demonstration)
Rheinwiesen
17 May 1962

Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker organized a ZERO show on the Rheinwiesen meadow along the Rhine River in Düsseldorf. Inside the white area (*Weisse Zone ZERO*) painted on the ground by Uecker



1



2

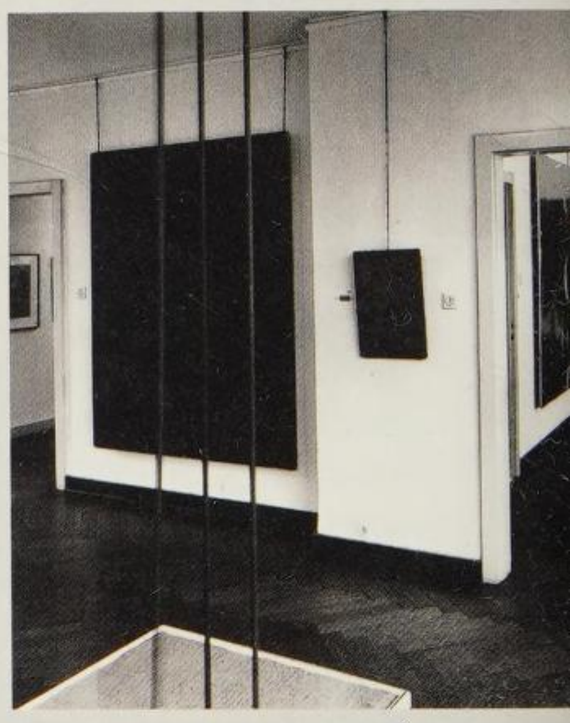
MUSEUM HAUS LANGE KREFELD

YVES KLEIN

MONOCHROME
UND FEUER

14. JANUAR – 26. FEBRUAR 1961

3



4



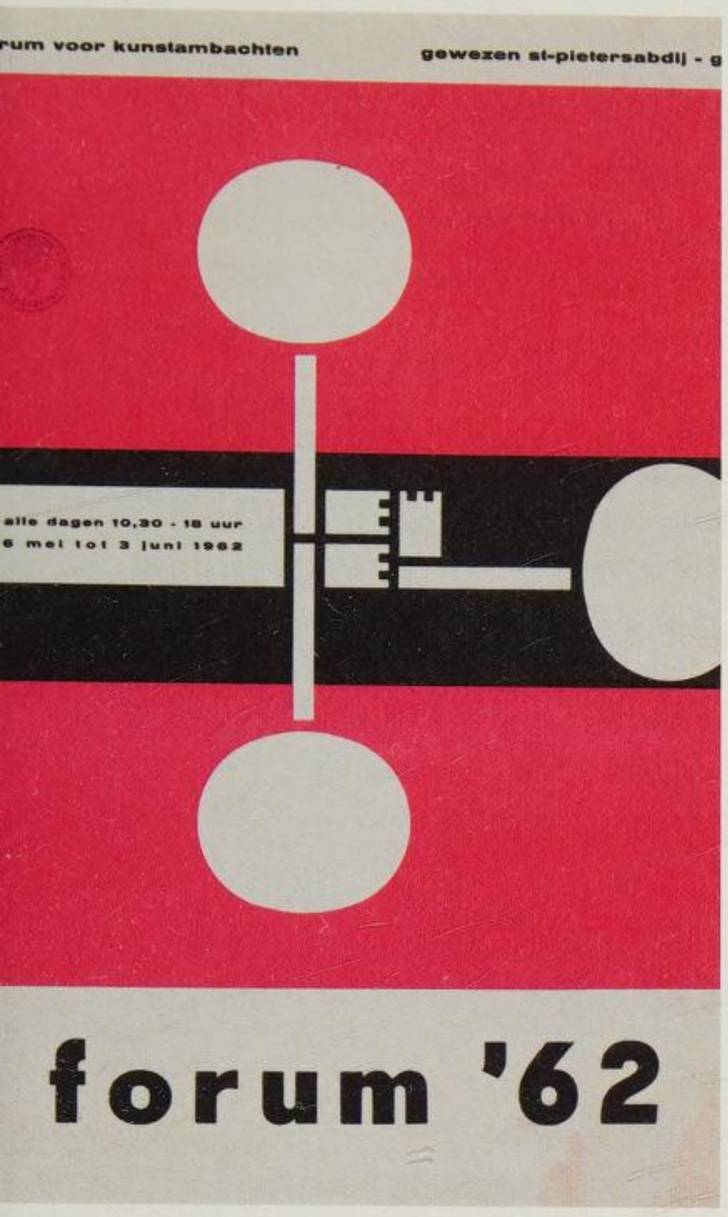
5



6

1961 **1** Joseph Beuys, ZERO – Demonstration, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf. **2** Yves Klein's exhibition, 'Monochrome and Fire', Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld. **3** Cover for the catalogue of Yves Klein's 'Monochrome and Fire' exhibition, Museum Haus Lange Krefeld. **4** View of Yves Klein's 'Monochrome and Fire' exhibition, Museum Haus Lange Krefeld. **5** ZERO – Demonstration, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf. **6** Otto Piene, ZERO – Demonstration, Schmela Gallery, Düsseldorf.

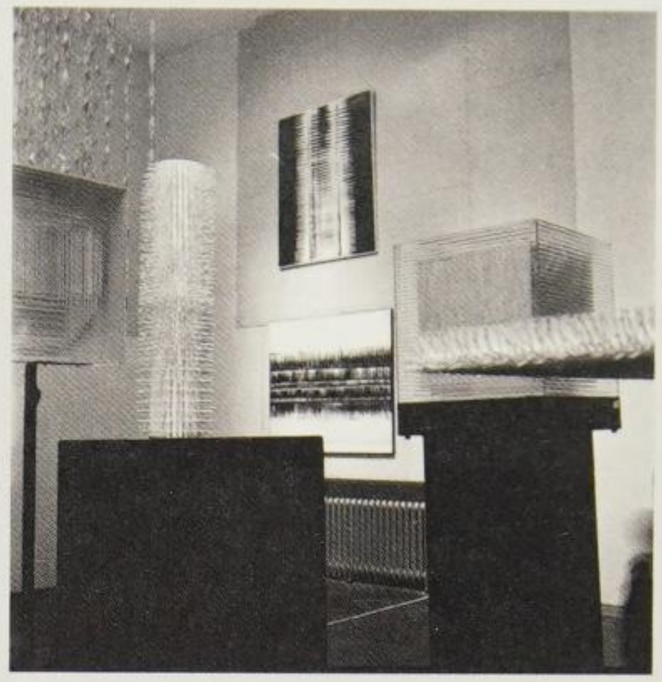
die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonn



1



2



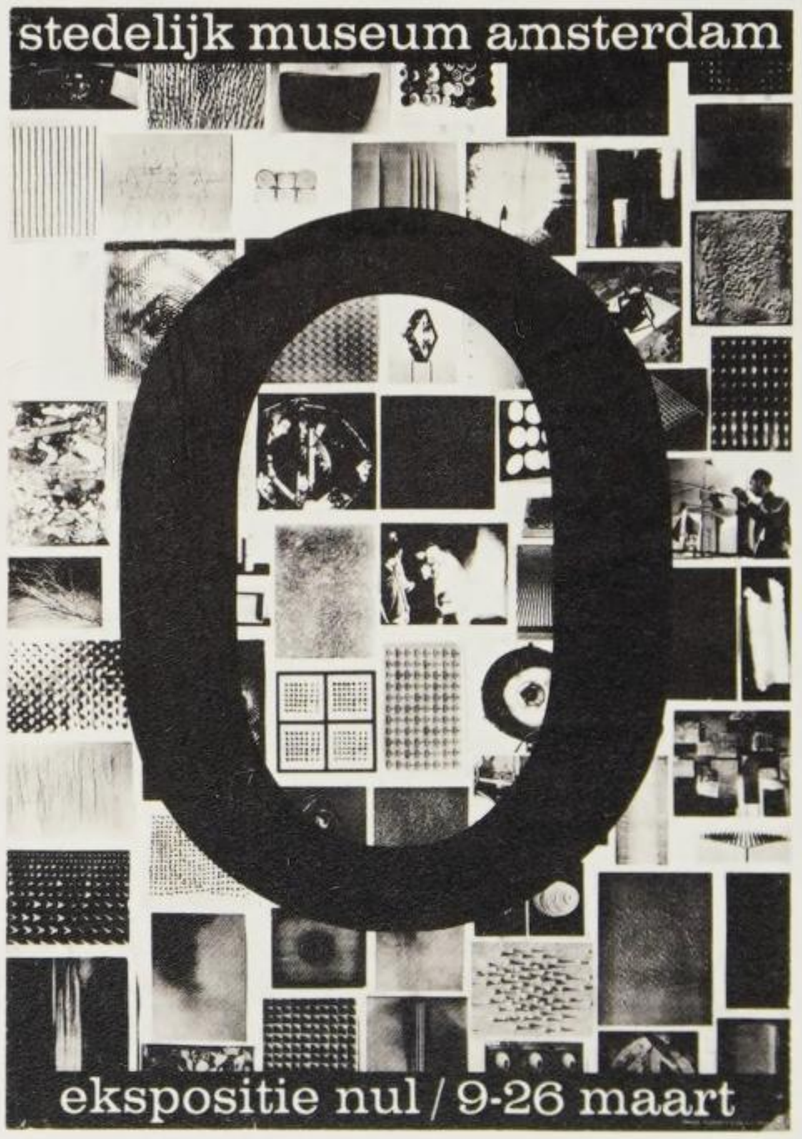
3



4



5



6

1962 **1** Poster for 'Forum 62'. **2** 'Forum '62', Centrum voor Kunstambachten, Gewezen St. Pietersabdij, Gent. **3** 'Nul' [Nul 62], Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. **4** Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. **5** ZERO-Demonstration, Rheinwiesen, Düsseldorf. **6** Poster for 'Nul'.

Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Aug

were girls in ZERO costumes, soap bubbles, bunches of grapes made of balloons and flags made of reflective aluminium sheets, while visitors danced to live music.

The event was organized as part of shooting the film *0 x 0 = Art. Artists Without Paint and Brush*, directed by Gerd Winkler. This film was first shown on television on 27 June 1962.

BRUSSELS
'Dynamo – Mack, Piene, Uecker'
Palais des Beaux-Arts
1–12 December 1962

This was the first exhibition to bring together the works of Mack, Piene and Uecker. One of the exhibits was *Salon de lumiere* (Light Room), which was a joint work by all three artists.

1963

6 February Piero Manzoni died in Milan at the age of 29. **19 March** The first colour television broadcast took place in the United States of America. **7 July** Opening of the 4th International Biennale in San Marino. ZERO and 'Gruppo N' were awarded first prize. **28 August** Martin Luther King led a march of 200,000 people to Washington, to protest about racial discrimination in the United States of America. **30 August** The Dutch Philips company advertised the first compact cassette and cassette recorder developed by Lou Ottens. **22 November** John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

KREFELD
'Mack, Piene, Uecker'
Museum Haus Lange
19 January–17 March 1963

Krefeld Museum director Paul Wember held the first museum exhibition in Germany to consist of works by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker. At this exhibition the artists organized a joint *Light Room*, in addition to other activities. In his opening speech, Piene talked about the New Idealism movement, which opposed the New Realism movement in Paris.

BERLIN
'ZERO'
Diogenes Gallery
30 March–30 April 1963

Diogenes Gallery in Berlin hosted a ZERO exhibition curated jointly by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker. Altogether 44 artists participated in the exhibition. To coincide with the exhibition, Mack, Piene and Uecker organized a ZERO festival in Berlin.

FRANKFURT
'Europaeische Avantgarde'
Galerie d, Schwanenhalle des Römer
9 July–11 August 1963
(extended until 25 August)

Works by contemporary artists and groups from seven countries took part in the exhibition. Artists included Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Heinz Mack, Piero Manzoni, Bruno Munari, Otto Piene, Uli Pohl, Jean Tinguely, Günther Uecker, Paul van Hoeydonck and Herman de Vries. The exhibition was received with such acclaim that it was extended by two weeks.

GELSENKIRCHEN
'ZERO in Gelsenkirchen'
Künstlersiedlung Halfmannshof
22 November–8 December 1963

Otto Piene organized a ZERO exhibition together with artist and exhibition manager Ferdinand Spindel. The exhibition was timed to coincide with the conference on city planning called 'Gesellschaft durch Dichte' organized by the German Architects Association on 27 and 28 November 1963. News of the assassination of John F. Kennedy cast a shadow over the opening of the exhibition.

1964

22 April The Kodak company organized the largest ever openair display of colour photographs at the opening of the New York World Fair. **20 June** Opening of the 32nd Venice Biennale. American artist Robert Rauschenberg was awarded the grand prize. **7 August** The United States of America started the Vietnam War. **14 October** Russian president Nikita S. Khrushchev was dismissed from office and replaced by Alexei N. Kosygin. Leonid Brezhnev became leader of the Communist Party. **10 December** Martin Luther King was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

THE HAGUE
'ZERO- 0 – Nul'
Gemeentemuseum
20 March–18 May 1964

Works by Dutch artists Armando, Henk Peeters and Jan J. Schoonhoven, as well as by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker, were shown at this exhibition. Mack, Piene and Uecker's joint work *Silberne Lichtmühle* (Silver Light Mill) was also exhibited. Soon afterwards this work was incorporated into the *Light Room*, which was also the work of these three artists and shown at documenta III. Installations by the Dutch artists used materials provided by the Sikkens Paint Factory. Peeters built a wall of empty paint cans, Schoonhoven made a pile of empty cardboard boxes and Armando made groups of many paintbrushes.

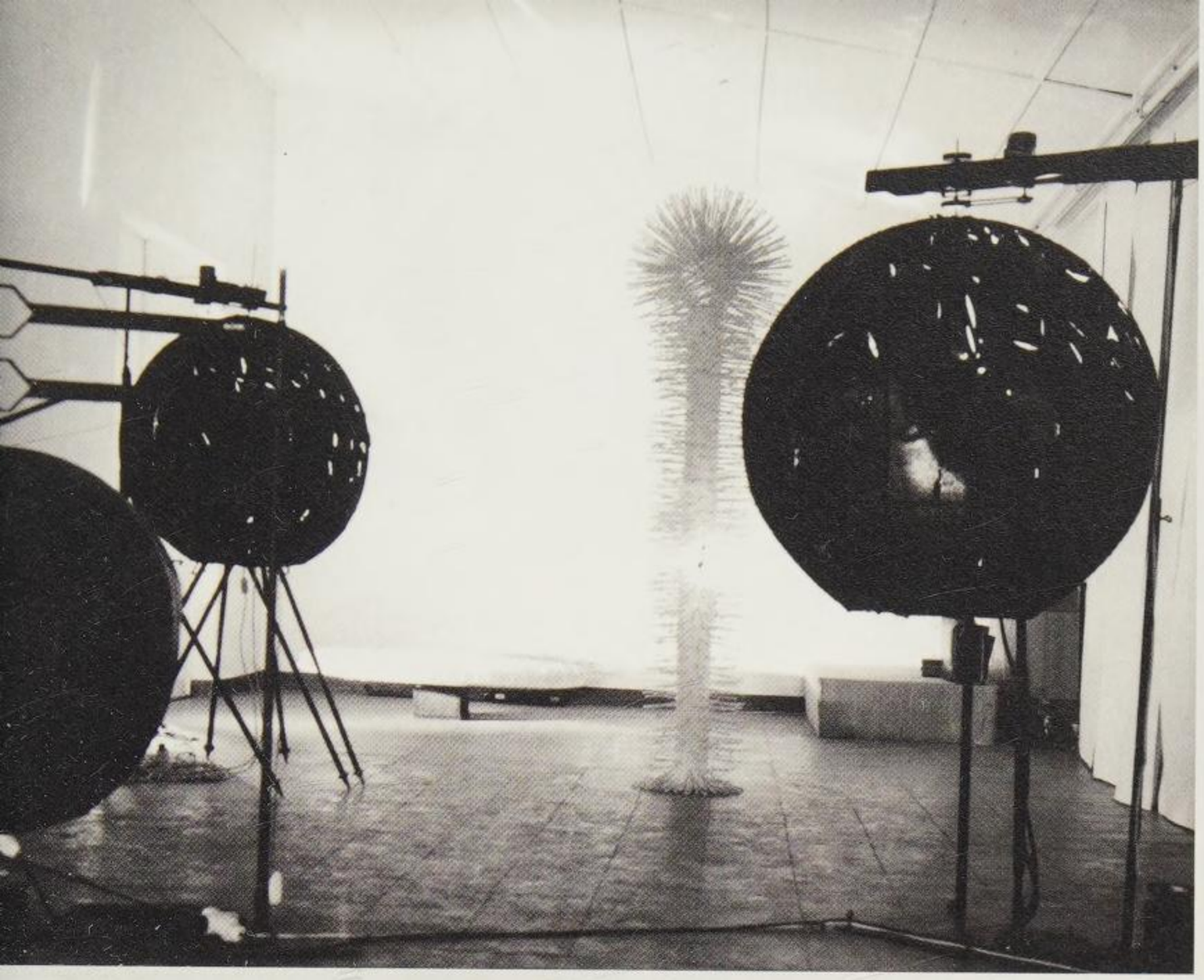
LONDON
'ZERO'
New Vision Centre Gallery
15 June–4 July 1964

This ZERO group exhibition of works by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker was held at the London gallery run by McRoberts and Tunnard. The exhibition was accompanied by ZERO film shows and a symposium at the ICA, and a ZERO Festival organized by Mack.

The exhibition at the New Vision Centre Gallery was the first ZERO group exhibition to be held in an English-speaking country.

LONDON
'Group ZERO - Mack Piene, Uecker'
McRoberts & Tunnard Gallery
23 June–18 July 1964

This three-person exhibition organized by Otto Piene in collaboration with the gallery owners coincided almost exactly with the ZERO group exhibition at the New Vision Centre Gallery. From this time onwards these three Düsseldorf artists were always associated together.



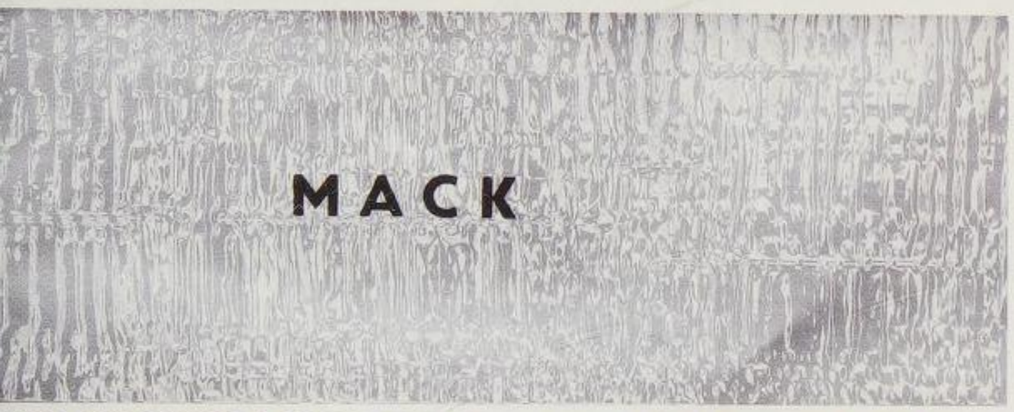
1



2



5



3



4

6

63 **1** 'ZERO in Gelsenkirchen', Künstlersiedlung Halfmannshof, Gelsenkirchen. **2** Günther Uecker, Heinz Mack, Hannah Weltmeier, Otto Piene, and Gotthard aubner, Diogenes Gallery, Berlin. **3** Poster for Piene and Uecker's exhibition in Krefeld. **4** Poster and invitation for the ZERO exhibition, Diogenes Gallery, Berlin. **5** uropäische Avantgarde', Galerie d in Schwanenhalle des Römer, Frankfurt. **6** 'Mack, Piene, Uecker', Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld.

n esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schö



1



2



3

McROBERTS AND TUNNARD GALLERY

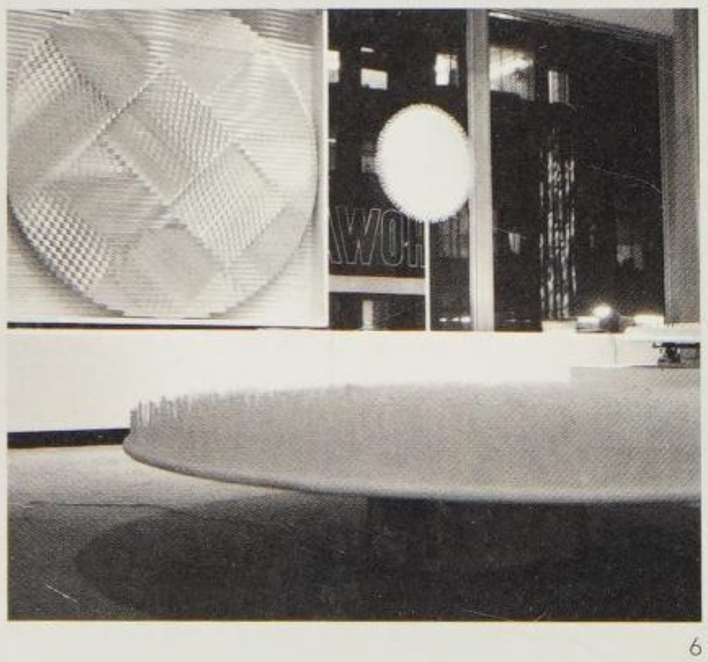
GROUP ZERO

MACK PIENE UECKER

June 23 – July 18
1964

34 CURZON STREET, LONDON, W.1 GRO 3811

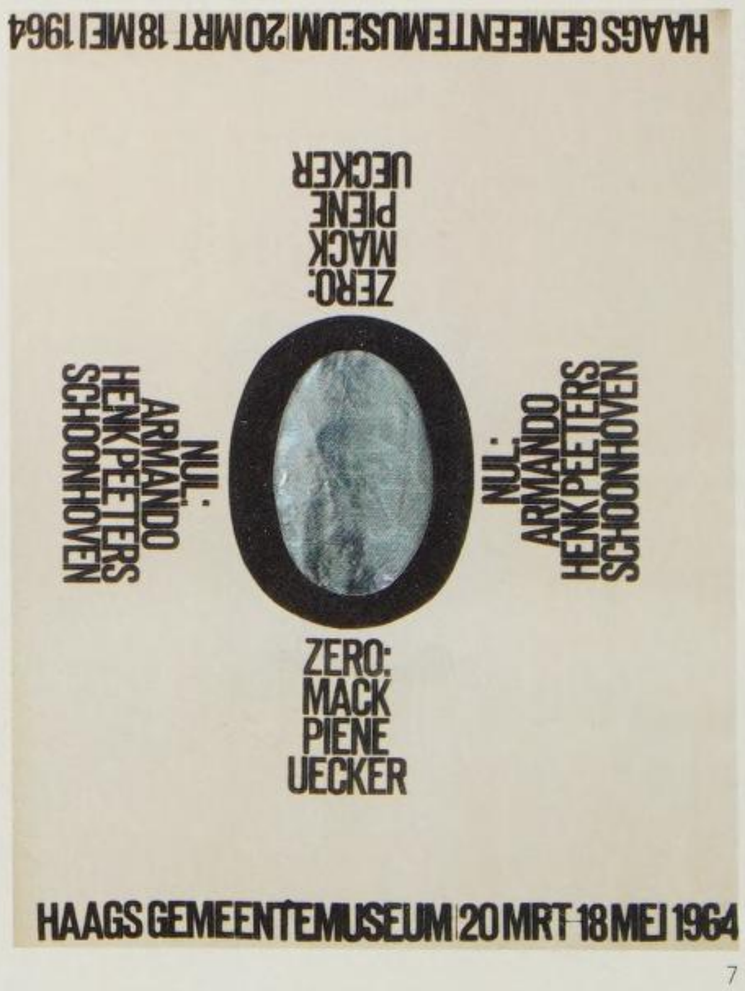
4



6



5



7

1964 **1** Günther Uecker, Otto Piene, Yayoi Kusama and Heinz Mack, Howard Wise Gallery, New York. **2** 'Integratie 64', Arena-Centrum Deurne, Deurne. **3** Poster for the 'ZERO' exhibition, The Washington Gallery of Modern Art. **4** Invitation for the 'Group ZERO' exhibition, McRoberts and Tunnard Gallery. **5** 'ZERO', Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. **6** 'ZERO' [Group ZERO: Mack, Piene, Uecker], Howard Wise Gallery, New York. **7** Poster for the 'ZERO-0-Nul' exhibition.

dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot or

KASSEL
documenta III – 'Light and Movement' Section
Museum Fridericianum
28 June–6 October 1964

documenta III was divided into three separate sections. Some contemporary works relating to light and movement by artists such as Günter Haese, Harry Kramer, Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, Nicolas Schöffer, Jesus Rafael Soto, Jean Tinguely and Günther Uecker were exhibited on the penthouse floor of the Fridericianum Museum. Mack, Piene and Uecker showed their installation entitled *Light Room–Tribute to Fontana*. This installation was comprised of seven separate works, including the collaborative *Silver Mill* and *White Mill*. As a protest against the documenta III organizers, who failed to invite Lucio Fontana, they dedicated the rooms to the Italian artist and included a projected image of one of Fontana's installations.

ANTWERP
'Integratie 64'
Arena-Centrum Deurne
26 September–26 October 1964

Artist Jef Verheyen and Belgium author Paul De Vree organized an exhibition entitled 'Integratie 64' on the relationship between art, technology and architecture. Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker were among the participants in the exhibition.

Works included Fontana's huge sculpture, *Time and Place*, made from perforated metal and illuminated from inside; drafts, models and photographs relating to buildings designed by architects; and photographs of urban art projects like Heinz Mack's *Desert Relief* on the façade of a school in Leverkusen.

PHILADELPHIA
'ZERO' [Group ZERO]
Institute of Contemporary Art, University of Pennsylvania
30 October–11 December 1964

The first international ZERO exhibition in the United States of America was organized by Otto Piene. For the exhibition poster, Piene used an image by the American artist Robert Indiana, who also participated in the exhibition. This ZERO exhibition marked the beginning of a new era for artists like Mack, Piene, Uecker, Haacke and Schoonhoven. They participated in major exhibitions in the United States. After Philadelphia, another ZERO exhibition was held at the Washington Gallery of Modern Art early in 1965.

NEW YORK
'ZERO' [Group ZERO: Mack, Piene, Uecker]
Howard Wise Gallery
12 November–5 December 1964

New York gallery owner Howard Wise held the first three-person exhibition of works by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker, which virtually coincided with the major ZERO group exhibition in Philadelphia. Wise's gallery was a leading platform for light and multimedia art in the 1960s. Wise supported the ZERO artists in America and until 1970 organized a series of exhibitions of their work. He enabled all three artists to hold solo exhibitions of their work at his gallery in 1965 and 1966.

1965

15 March The United States attacked North Vietnam with napalm bombs. Student protests against the Vietnam War began. **6 August** American president Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act, granting the vote to all African Americans. **9 November** A power cut across the northern United States and Canada left 30 million people without electricity. Some districts of New York were in darkness for 10 hours. A year after this event, Otto Piene produced his multimedia work entitled *Light Auction* or *New York in Darkness*.

MILAN
'ZERO avantgarde 1965'
Studio Lucio Fontana
27 March–2 April 1965

Italian woman architect and artist Nanda Vigo organized a mobile exhibition of works by the ZERO group. Following in the footsteps of her partner Piero Manzoni following his death, she forged contacts between Italian artists and ZERO artists in other countries. Lucio Fontana, who kept in touch with Vigo, allowed her to use his Milan studio for her first presentation of ZERO avant-garde. The purpose of this initiative, designed as a touring exhibition, was to promote the European ZERO movement in Italy and awaken public interest. The exhibition was shown in many Italian cities up to the end of 1966.

AMSTERDAM
'Nul negentienhondert vijf en zestig' [Nul 1965]
Stedelijk Museum
15 April–7 June 1965

Henk Peeters opened a new group exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. This exhibition consisted of works by ZERO, Nul, Gruppo T and a Japanese group of artists called Gutai. Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker were represented by numerous works, among them Mack's *Lightcarousel* (today demolished) and Uecker's *New York Dancers*, which revolves around its own axis. Piene's *Permanent Lichttheater* and various projections were brought together and exhibited as an installation.

HANNOVER
'Mack, Piene, Uecker'
Kestner-Gesellschaft
7 May–7 June 1965

Wieland Schmied, director of the Kestner Gesellschaft in Hannover, curated the first major exhibition of work by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker. This consisted of selected works created over the previous five years. The exhibition catalogue consisted of summaries of ZERO's past works, biographies of all three artists and various texts.

THE HAGUE
'ZERO op zee' (ZERO at sea)
Pier von Scheveningen
September 1965
(planned but abandoned)

Owner of Pier von Scheveningen, Henk Peeters, and owners of Internationale galerij Orez, Albert Vogel and Leo Verboon, planned some events on a very large site near The Hague, but these never materialised.

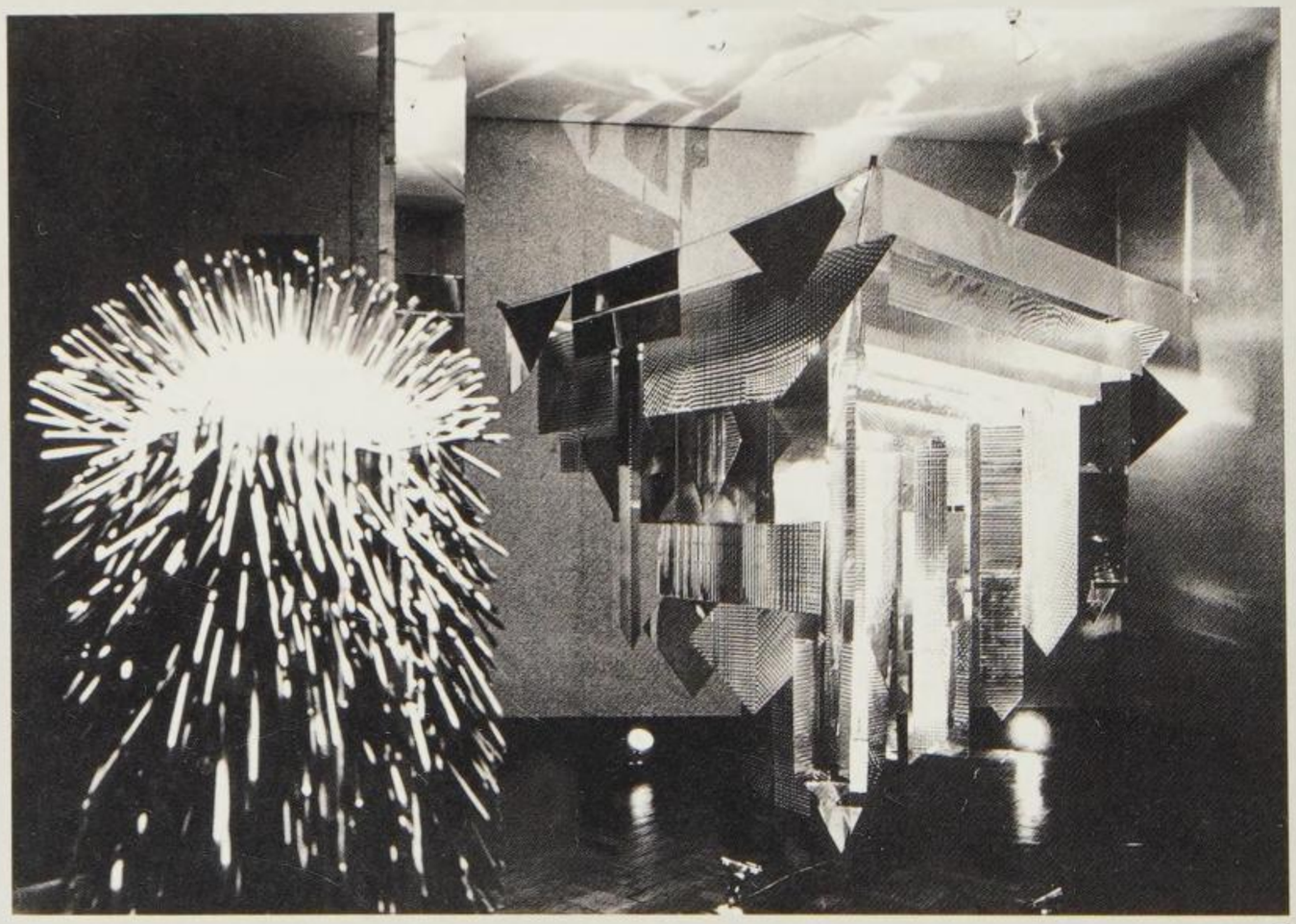
'ZERO op zee' (ZERO at sea) was to turn Scheveningen wharf into a temporary multimedia installation for three weeks. The environs of the wharf - sea, beach and sky – were to be included in the concept. Diverse ideas of the artists were the first examples of the newly emerging Land Art and Concept Art. Nearly 50 artists from 25 countries participated in this ambitious project.



1



2



3

1965 **1** Jiro Yoshihara, Hans Haacke, Henk Peeters, Rotraut Klein, Jan J. Schoonhoven, Lucio Fontana, Pol Bury, Gianni Colombo, Teresita Fontana, Edy de Wilde, Nono Reinhold-de Wilde, Yayoi Kusama, George Rickey, Jesus Rafael Soto (montage) Otto Piene, Nanda Vigo, Alfred Schmela, Heinz Mack, Emile Soestbergen and Günther Uecker. 'Nul 1965', Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. **2** 'ZERO avantgarde 1965', Atelier Lucio Fontana, Milan. **3** Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1965. **4** 'Nul 1965', Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. **5** Poster for the 'Nul' exhibition, Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum. **6** 'Nul 1965', Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam. **7** Nanda Vigo, Lucio Fontana, 'ZERO avantgarde 1965', Atelier Lucio Fontana, Milan. **8** Poster for 'ZERO avantgarde' exhibition in Venice and Milan. **9** 'Zero op zee' Henk Peeters, photomontage of works by Akira Kanayama, Heinz Mack, Yves Klein and Gabriela Devecchi.

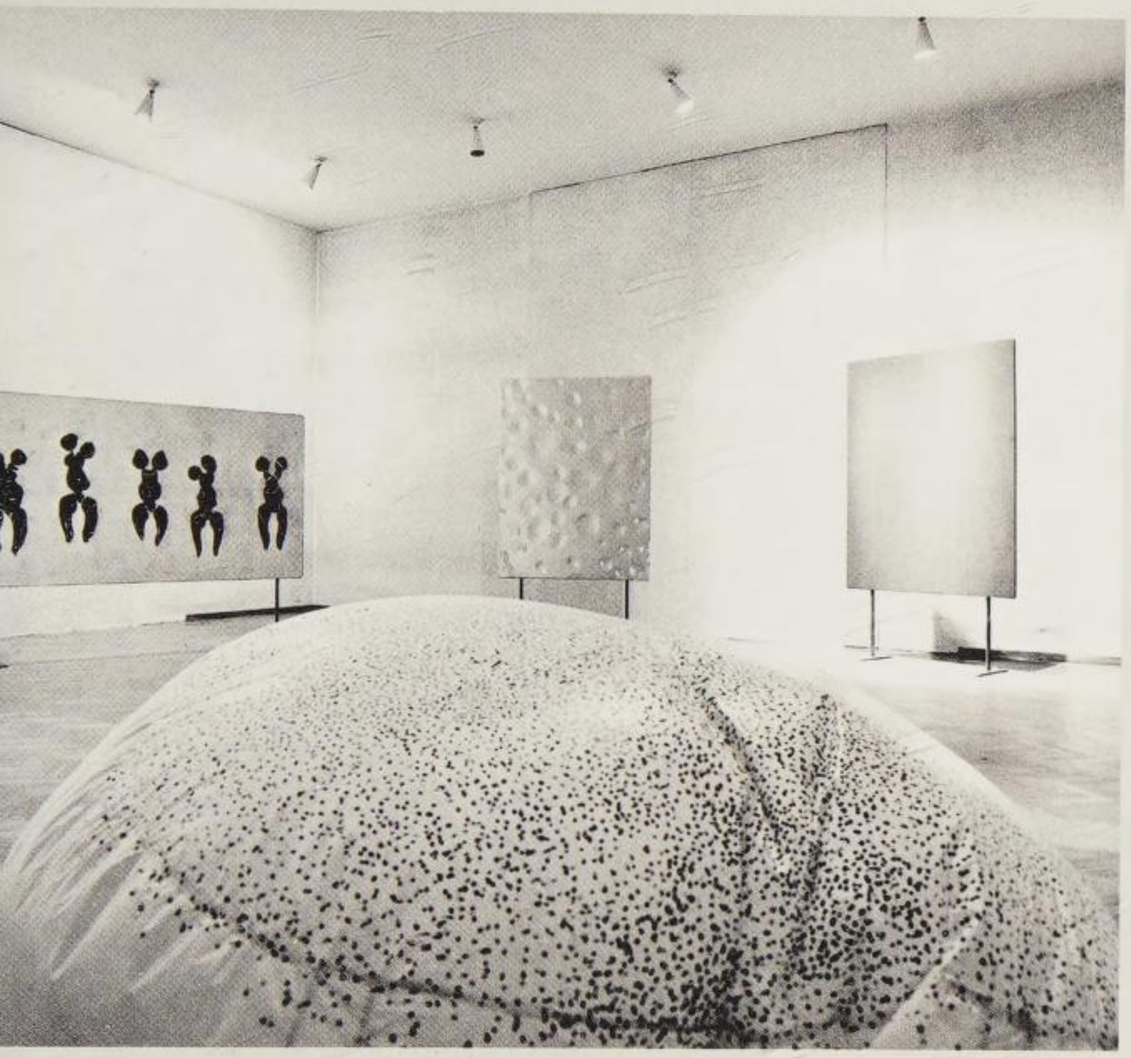
und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero ist rund. Zero ist Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der A



4



5



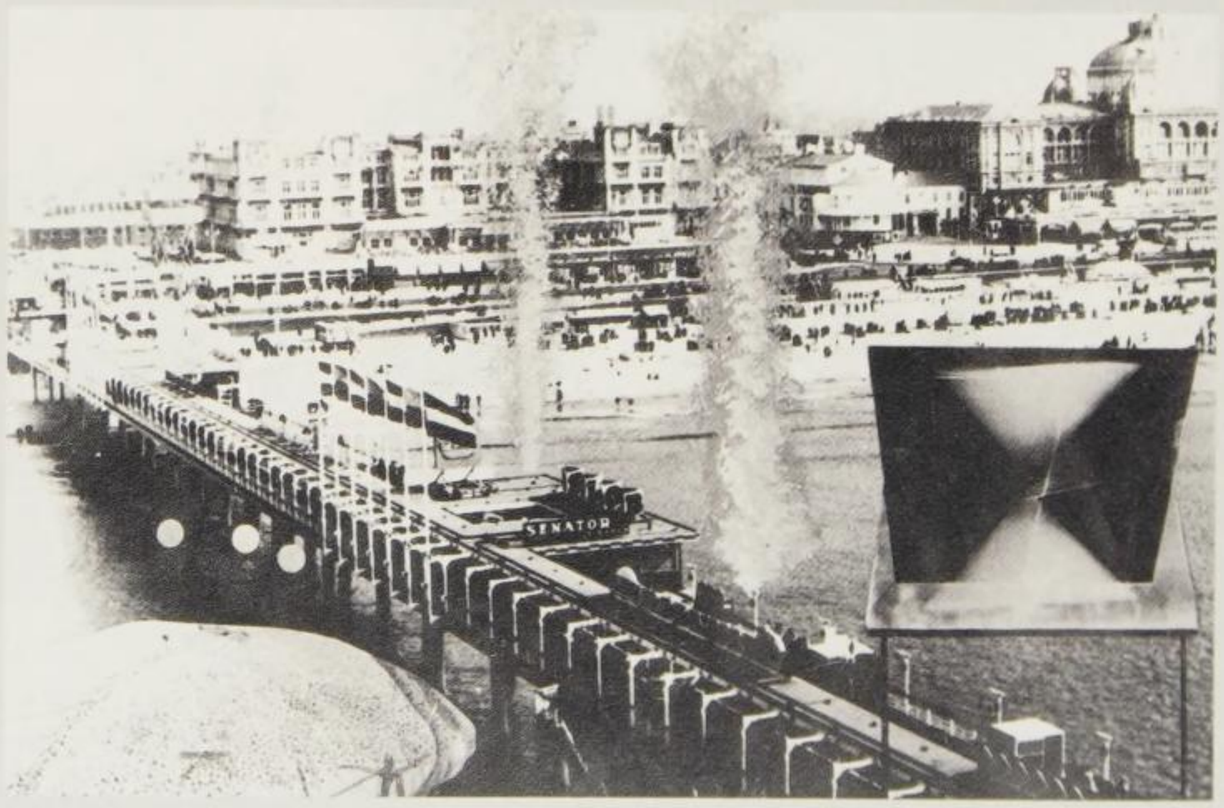
6



7

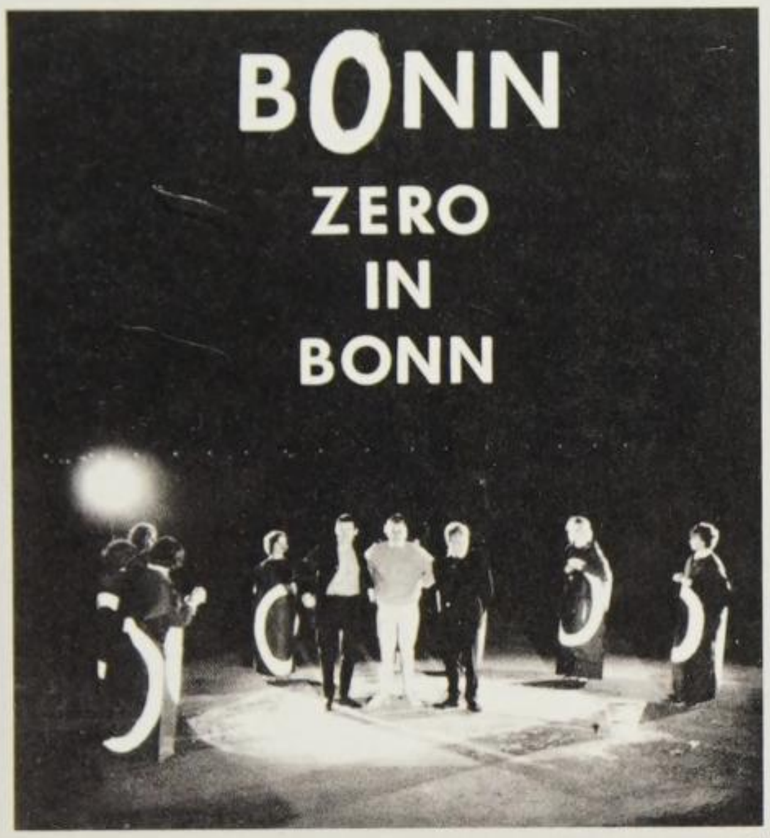


8



9

ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste



1



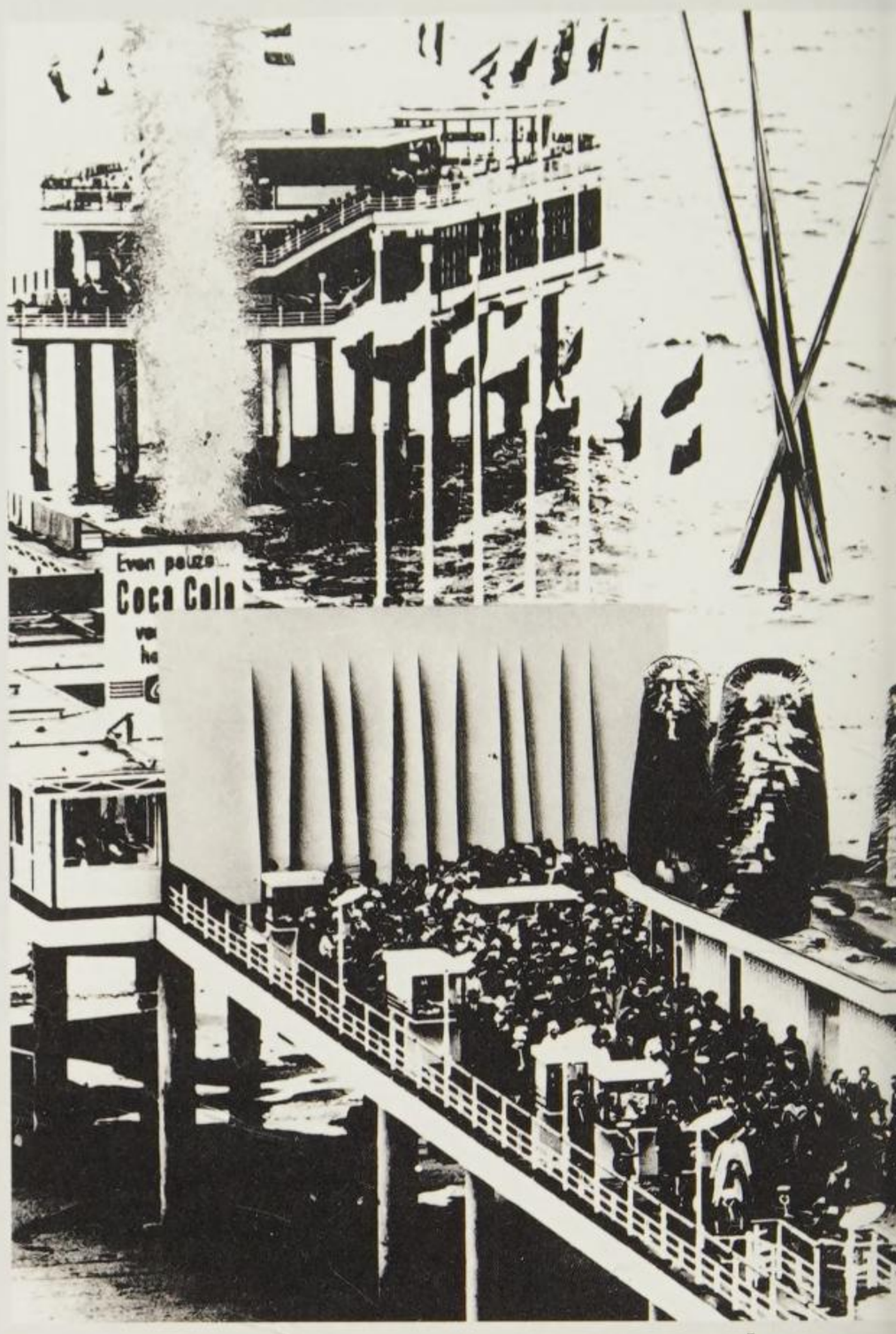
2



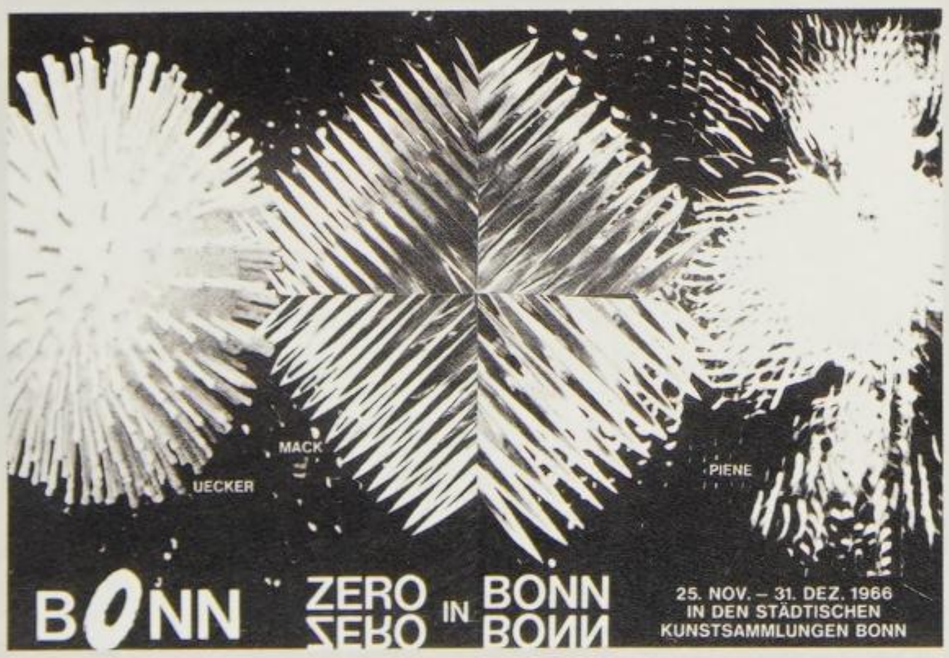
3



4



5



6



7

1966 **1** Cover of the 'ZERO in Bonn' exhibition catalogue. **2** Article in *Het Vaderland* for 'ZERO op zee', August 4, 1965. **3** 'KunstLichtKunst', Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven. **4** ZERO in Bonn, Städtische Kunstsammlungen. **5** 'ZERO op zee', Henk Peeters, photomontage of works by Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana, George Rickey and Günther Uecker. **6** Poster for the 'ZERO in Bonn' exhibition. **7** ZERO Midnight Ball, Bahnhof Rolandseck (Remagen), Bonn.

Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kus

The project was planned for September 1965, but due to weather conditions and financial difficulties it was postponed until spring 1966 and finally abandoned altogether. Instead some of the project designs and models were exhibited at the Orez Gallery in April 1966. Some of the designs were published in June the following year in the architectural magazine *Forum voor architektur en daamee verbonden kunsten.*

1966

1 March In November 1965 the Venera 3 spacecraft was launched by the Soviet Union and became the first to land on Venus. **14 June** 33rd Venice Biennale opened. The grand prize was awarded to the Argentinian artist Julio le Parc. **10 August** The American spacecraft Lunar Orbiter 1 was launched to the moon and relayed the first aerial photographs of the earth and the moon. **18 August** The Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution was launched in China by Mao Tse Tung.

EINDHOVEN
'KunstLichtKunst' (Artificial Light Art)
Stedelijk van Abbemuseum
25 September–4 December 1966

This exhibition was originally designed as an overview of how the subject of light has been treated in art since the time of the impressionists. Subsequently the curators decided that the focal point of the exhibition should be the use of artificial light in the works of contemporary artists. As well as the Milan Gruppo T, Mack, Piene and Uecker created the *Light Room*. This was to be their last collaborative work. Mack, Piene and Uecker also co-authored an article entitled '19 Questions for Light' for the exhibition.

BONN
'ZERO in Bonn'
Staedtische Kunstsammlungen
'ZERO – Mitternachtsball' (Midnight Ball)
Bahnhof Rolandseck (Remagen)
25 November–31 December 1966

This exhibition was the last ZERO project organized jointly by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker. The three artists exhibited their works in separate areas of a shared space, and their installations in three different small rooms.

The concept of the exhibition reflected a definite rift that had existed between the three artists for a long time. Following the opening they celebrated the end of their joint activities with a large festival at Bahnhof Rolandseck 15 km away. Nearly two thousand people participated in this live music event called 'ZERO ist gut für Dich' (ZERO is good for you). These three Düsseldorf artists had driven the movement, and when they stopped collaborating, ZERO effectively came to an end.



the new dynamic structure

heinz mack

1. The almost accidental discovery that art emerges unexpectedly disturbs our common sense and provokes in us an uncommonly critical attitude. Theoretical contemplation is only dangerous to the artist when it is speculative, i.e., when the sensation of the finished work does not both anticipate and follow the work. I have never hesitated to reflect on my own work.

2. Contemporary painting, which has overcome the mannerism of geometric abstraction, finds itself in a disorganized state, i.e., one of giddiness, after finally finding its own champions.

3. The following essay is based not only on my own work, but on a new concept of painting.

When we talk about painting we are talking about color. First, last, and always, the ultimate significance a color can achieve is that it fulfills its own unique creative function; only then can it attain its freedom, its greatest intensity; color is itself!

If I set one color in contrast to another, I may possibly intensify the first, but at the same time I am restricting its freedom, because there is a governing relationship between the degrees of intensity and dependence.

A color can have several meanings. However, its virtual objectification, i.e., its intrinsic energy, is achieved when it strikes its own vibration; that is its life, its breath.

(Leonardo da Vinci or Mondrian, for example, sought the 'balanced relationship' between different color spaces, not color contrasts.)

The possibility of expressing 'one color by all colors' must be contrasted with the possibility of expressing all colors through one color. This idea makes sense only because it is possible to bring one color into play so that it becomes completely self-sufficient. We can achieve such intensity of color vibration through a continuum of deviations from an ideal monochrome, or through a continuum of graduated value of the same.

The primary condition for vibration of color is that some elements remain stable throughout chromatic modulation; in this way color is given its freedom.

I impart vibration to a color, i.e., I give the color structure, or I give the color its form. There is nothing more to say regarding the notion of 'form' in the traditional sense.

Overcoming polychromaticism through color itself means that we must give up composition in favor of a simple structure zone, i.e., the simple 'coming together' of all creative elements. The painter accomplishes unity in a work, among other means, by knowing precisely the function of each simple constituent; in place of 'interesting' detail we substitute a completely insipid structural element that is only meaningful when it is related to the whole. In this way the structural element achieves its individuality, its unique significance. To speak of such an element by itself is meaningless. (The 'images within the painting,' the 'effects,' the predomination of isolated single forms, do not exist any more.) In other words, 'structure' in the sense of 'unity,' overall form, is destructible, but its elements remain in their unadulterated diversity. Once this is recognized it will mean exciting results for the painter.

To me such an element of structure is, for instance, a number of parallel straight lines in a horizontal or vertical arrangement. The pattern of such lines is infinitely variable; the principle involved is the simultaneous and recurring sequence of the lines. (These lines need not be exact.) Every zone in between two lines displays an immensely rich color—form structure; accidental creation is given a real chance—the lines arrange themselves.

Individual parallel zones gradually transform themselves from zone to zone, while at the same time they retain their distinct but mutual character—in this way they are brought into vibration.

The artistic method in this case is an open mechanical arrangement. The mechanics of artistic activity get stimulated and directed by the sensitivity of the artist's hands—hence it escapes the danger of mechanical repetition, which continues to be uncreative. In principle, all parallel zones have the same intensity of presence.

Consequently there is nothing more to be said about composition or variations of formal themes. These are contradictory to the pictorial structure, which is dynamic. Parallel zones have not only a static but also a dynamic being. The dialectics of static and dynamic elements produce virtual vibration, i.e., pure, perpetually creative movement, which cannot be found in nature. It is free of all suggestive illusion; it is directionless and therefore never finalized. Time cannot be actualized in it.

After twenty years of classical neoplastic painting, Mondrian turned away from this kind of work: 'The vitality of uninterrupted succession, which really constitutes time, constantly disrupts balance.' The three paintings of the *Boogie-Woogie* series of 1940–1944, his last and most distinguished works, are the expression of a new, i.e., dynamic and balanced, relationship, which counteracts static balance. With this a structured movement is achieved and hence vibration.

This promises a new pictorial space. By pictorial space I understand the continuous integration of a number of individual spaces. The differentiated pictorial spaces become proportional to one another, producing a certain order. Above all, the new structural order of pictorial space will be determined by the space value of color and its frequency. The clarity of relations of pictorial space is determined by the eye alone. The ability of the eye to achieve this is an extraordinary quality. Consequently every mathematical-statistical configuration becomes unnecessary. In turn, only through the structuring of color space is vibration of color possible

at all. Movement will not only be realized on the surface of the painting but will also leap out at the observer unexpectedly. Depth of image becomes irrelevant. Representational-physical pictorial space should be done away with, even when it appears abstract. Likewise, atmospheric pictorial space is a kind of naturalism.

Painting, as a dynamic structure that is entirely self-sufficient, points to a new vitality of painterly nuance. But this becomes true only when the painting discovers its concrete implications. Color can only be dematerialized and its purity brought to light in a strictly painterly discipline. Restraint, however, means plenitude. Infinitude of possibility is a beautiful thing for the artist if it does not lead to *aporia*. Such aimlessness must be conquered in order not to be destroyed by it. The neo-expressionist method was just such an aporia, a negative freedom. Following this, lyricism seemed like a refuge.

The exclusiveness of a completely nonrepresentational, dynamic pictorial structure, light years apart from nature, will be redeemed in a pure emotion. It will unveil a new reality, whose secret beauty we now only suspect.

Heinz Mack, 'The New Dynamic Structure,' *ZERO* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973 (reprint and translation of the three issues of the journal), 14–15.

the sahara project
heinz mack

They ask: Can the project be realized?

I answer: Yes!

Luckily, the nature of the earth does not as yet permit the entire contents of our world to be distributed in one spatial uniformity; under the same sky, we still find reserves of nature whose dimensions must be of enormous size, or so it seems, so that even atomic explosions are lost in them.

I admit that such spaces fill my imagination; most of all, I admire the serenity of their untiring expanse. Space, deep and open, unbounded even by horizons, is the free sphere for my eyes, which hurry over things near and far, aimlessly, without purpose, unencumbered, until my glance returns on itself. The experience of distance stays with me.

In such spaces, the clarity of light and the fullness of the silence are forever expanding. From the light, the space gets its sensuality, its atmosphere, its transparency. Light unburdens space.

Silence weighs space down; through silence space is audible. In such space we feel that our senses are finely attuned.

I would like us to seek out the immeasurable spaces of nature in order to realize in them a second space, a measurable one, the space of art. This artificial space I call the reservation of art. In this reservation, which will eventually become an entirety in itself, art must find a new freedom. The Sahara Project is to set this freedom in motion.

Our brave hopes, our stirring dreams, our ideas and our actions will grow confused, will be lost and finally betrayed if we are still ready to give up our work to the muddled contents of this world. The guiding principles of art, conceived to protect our interests, still manifest the immutability of the graveyard. In this we are tricked by our own vanities, demanding their conservation.



Tomorrow, though, we will have to embark on the search for a new dimension of art and for new spaces in which our psyches will take on an incomparable appearance. Such spaces are: the sky, the sea, Antarctica, the deserts. Within these reservations of art we will float like artificial islands.

The idea of an artificial 'garden' in the Sahara follows the proposal of a vibrating pillar of light in a desert. One aspect of this conception fascinates me above all; it must be possible to set in vibration a projection of light so strong that its intensity necessarily demands a new environment whose extent no longer corresponds to the classical rules of measurement, volume, and proportion.

Electric light requires darkness as its one suitable environment; it fills space only visually. Here, however, as well as the light being visible in light, the light should also be visible in space.

In the uniform light that the sun radiates, there appears henceforth the manifest form of a fountain of light, a volume of light of shining intensity.

In my attempts to give this artificial light a general meaning in space, freed from its objective content, it became clear to me that space, the space of the desert, is particularly suitable for capturing this vibrating projection of light.

Also, the unusual height of the pillar of light demands special spatial proportions.

After this conception had occupied me for two years, I eventually decided to bring it out of its isolation by using my daydreams to transport the most variegated artistic objects into the desert where they could become new apparitions of light and space.

Even if I now give a description of the various stages of the project, in which I and my artist friends, for example, Arman, Fontana, Klein, and Piene, have taken part, I am not yet able to review the dynamic integration of the individual manifestations.

Just as the artificial space of the reservation has a neighborless neighborhood relationship with natural space, so will the plastic sculptures in the reservation stand in the same relationship with each other. That is the meaning of the new integration. The neighborhood of non-neighborhood is the first principle of the total reservation. From this will have to emerge a new form of collaboration between the participating artists, for whom the only condition is to be free of all conditions.

Station 1 · The Pillars of Light
1. Position: a group of ten pillars in the middle of the sea.

2. Position: a single extremely high pillar in the desert, not far from the sea.

These pillars of light, visible from a long way off, rear up like the beacons of the reservation. A pillar consists of an upright axle on which vertical reflector mirrors are erected like thin wings. These reflect the sun intensely. The various fields of light vibration grow into volumes of light, continually interchanging with one another. The total volume of light is determined in its structure by the relief of the reflectors as weft as by the position of the sun. A cloak of intense light plays over the materiality of the technical construction; the light acquires immateriality as the observer gains distance.

As the pillars 'in the middle of the sea' are carried on floats, they continually change their position and therefore their grouping. Thus it is possible that we sometimes meet them quite unexpectedly; at other times perhaps we look for them and do not find them. They are like light-carrying ships hulling rudderless on the ocean.

Station 2 · The Mirror Wall
Position: halfway between the sea and the reservation.

An unbroken surface of mirrors, more than 100 meters long and about 5 meters high, is erected in the sand of the desert. Approaching the mirror, the observer confronts a situation in which he inescapably comes face to face with himself.

Station 3 · The Sails
Position: halfway between the mirror wall and the reservation.

Several upright, drum-tight, snow white sails of various sizes show the pungency of a single human gesture, which does not hesitate to disrupt the surfaces in order to provoke the space, the light, and the shadow.[1]

Station 4 · The Sand Reliefs
Position: the reliefs form a *passe-partout* zone in the immediate vicinity of the reservation.

reht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himm

These reliefs are the labyrinths of the wind, which carries the sand through the air. A series of glass sheets is arranged in the sand. Because of their resistance, the flying sand forms artificial structures and modulations, seen in their full plasticity in the light of the sinking sun.[2]

Station 5 · Artificial Woods and Gardens

Here we find an oasis of petrified and motionless vitality. Gardens such as no gardener ever dreamed of, laid out like a carpet for the earth, show off the elements of our structures in never-ending plurality. The incalculable, the rigid emotion of multiplication determines the outlines of the plantation and forest screens. Forests of fungus growth, reliefs consisting of nails driven randomly into staves, screens of rising columns of smoke and fire, accumulations of serially arranged objects and catapulted flashes of light, this is the vegetation.[3]

Station 6 · The Machine Park

It displays the machines in one single conglomeration, which is comprehensible because it is poetic. Its constructor, fascinated by the weakness in the system, has the courage of a tamer who drills his mechanical lions, but forgets the drill in order to be able to offer perilous, unforeseen complications.

I would like its volumes of rotation to stand like giant cyclones in space, as stable apparitions of spherical light and of wind.[4] This area will be surrounded by colored clouds of gas, whose pneumatic pulsation can be directed.

Station 7 · The Plateaus

On high, level plains endless successions of laminated screens are spread out, until they finally vanish on their own horizon. Under the Sahara sky they become contrasts of light, caught by the ever-returning undulations. Inevitably the shadows remain alongside, happily, unhappily. Thus the light and the shadows are given the same chance to project profiles.

All laminations are the same shape and are ordered in parallel rows. This mechanical principle is upset by the spectral intervals of all spaces, which re-form into rhythmic groups. Moreover, the surface expanse of the whole structure of lamination is fanned out radially to achieve the highest possible modulation of the sequence.

According to the changing position of the sun and of the observer, the light-shadow structure of the relief alters.

The large plateaus are made of prefabricated cement laminations, the smaller ones of pure white marble, which absorbs the light, reflects it sharply, and pours it out into the silence of the shadow.

Station 8 · The Parade

It is longer than any road in the world and stretches from a monochrome wall, which is blue, to a wall covered with one pure silver light. Going up and down the parade, the walker remains in the field of influence of both surfaces. When he approaches the color, he is filled by blue; when he approaches the light, he is filled by it. When he is between the color and the light, he is filled by both color and light.

The parade itself is made of mirrors. The costume worn by the walker is a spun web of mirror. So it is not the earth that carries the walker. We are walking on the mirror of the sky.

What impression will we have, and what will we speak about, if we speak?[5]

Station 9 · The Symposium

This is at the central point of the reservation and is only accessible to the participating artists. A cube, hermetically sealed on the outside, whose walls are again made of milk-white marble, resting in a sea of quicksilver. A room of white light by Yves Klein.

Station 10 · The Light Reliefs

The light reliefs are seen as free surfaces in the sky. Their vibrating light impulses result from the reflection of the light on their extreme upper surfaces. Highly polished metals effect the real articulation of the light by means of the relief itself, which outshines and overpowers the materiality of the metal.

These light reliefs, as I call them, show the ability to change their structure as the light falling on them changes its angle of incidence or its intensity. If the position of the sun changes, the appearance of the light reliefs changes. Thus the structure is suspended from any fixed identity. The change of the structure of the reliefs can also be taken further by means of transparent media, which are placed in front of the metal surfaces, and which by reason of their inherent properties filter and distort the optics of the light reflection. These media are of engraved glass or electrically charged layers of air and display a structure of fractured light, so that the structure of the light reflection caused by the metal is integrated with the structure of the light filter.

When one stands very far from them, the reliefs of light acquire an intensity of vibration that can be especially suggestive. Such a system corresponds to the new contents of space and defines the impressions that fill the observer.

Most of all, the distance in space from which we face the apparitions is suited to the conquest of materiality. In agreement with this principle is the imponderable mirroring of all colors and movements in the reliefs of light. The color of the sky gives to the light apparitions their temperature, and especially bright light vibrations possess an immaterial tonality.

Station 11 · The Monuments of Light

Mass produced, prefabricated reflectors arranged in serial formations totally cover giant cement cubes which makes them then appear to be cubes of light. As examples of uninhabitable architecture, they manifest the same neighborless neighborhood as the pyramids, surrounded by the infinite anonymity of the space, whose monumental expressions they are.

These cubes, however, pulsating, writhing volumes of light that they are, take on a new dynamic, in complete contrast to the frozen statics of the pyramids. The limitations of artificial space are in motion here, too. Inside the light cubes are the monochrome halls of the blue void.[6]

Station 12 · The Artificial Suns

The slowly rotating light formations of my dynamo will produce their own energy if their diameter is 50 to 100 meters. Instead of a number of small light structures, I would like to have the open dimensions of a big plane of light, the shape of whose movement continually changes, disappears, and reappears. This perpetual alternation is its 'property.'

The phenomenon of Fata Morgana makes these artificial suns appear to hang in the sky as apparitions.

Station 13 · Apparitions in the Sky
Silver balloons, floating in the sky, carry invisible nets, in which light-reflecting membranes are hanging. When the height of an individual balloon alters, then these transparent veils of light take on a simultaneous movement formation. The open, unobservable area of light diffusion in the sky acquires an unexpected articulation from these immaterial carriers of light.

The spatial constellations are a result of the volume contained by the light membranes and the momentary intensity with which they are lit. Apart from constellations of space, linear and surface constellations are also possible.

The proportions of space will be particularly unreal if the small-sized light carriers are given a strong intensity and the larger media a smaller intensity, since through these properties the individual parts have their special functions.

Through the movements of the entire 'sky curtain' and also of the individual parts, the contents of the space are changed. The momentary light reflection is also changed as a small turning movement of the light carrier allows it to be differently lit, by reason of its changing position vis-à-vis the natural sun. This way the artificial 'star,' which a second ago was vibrating heavily, seems to sink into the sky, only to suddenly rise again.

The color of the sun is reflected in its new satellites.

The reservation of art does not only occur on earth.

The Sahara project will be misunderstood if one assumes that its aim is to achieve the surrealistic effect of an estrangement of environment through transporting artistic objects, in their present state, into the desert.

In spite of this, I have included these objects in the projection, because here they gain the real vehemence of their being; on the other hand, I used them as guiding marks for the new manifestations of a hitherto unseen artificial reality.

The travels of our imaginations take us farther from the stifling melancholy of the old habits whose archaic rust we call the culture of Europe. A new collaboration of artists will have to separate the creators from the consumers of art, just as we must do with its Utopians and prophets.

The total reservation of art will be a new freedom. It is an expression of the zone Zero, the expression of our limitless expectations.

Only if we have the courage to realize the total reservation may we hope that the beautiful will shine forth anew in the world.

Heinz Mack, 'The Sahara Project,' *ZERO* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973 (reprint and translation of the three issues of the journal), 180–184.

---

[1] Fontana
[2] Klein, Uecker, Castellani, Piene, Arman, Mavignier
[3] Tinguely
[4] Klein, Moldow, Manzoni
[5] Klein—Mack
[6] Klein

resting restlessness

heinz mack

Painting engages the eye –this confrontation occurs dynamically– our eyes enjoy resting in restlessness.

The restlessness of rest, however, is scarcely perceptible, a contrast to the rhythm of the heart; it is movement that destroys itself; it does not give us the kind of vision that is alert, clear, and a measure of the immeasurable. Our painterly sensibility is a sensibility of sight. The motionless and the finite limit our vision and tire our eyes, and in the end deny them.

Among all the possible conditions derived from the concept of movement, only one is aesthetic: resting restlessness –it is the expression of continuous movement, which we call 'vibration', and which our eyes experience aesthetically. Its harmony stirs our souls, as the life and breath of the work.

Just as a strong wind gives form to a thousand clouds, so creative movement can give spatial organization to color and formal components; in movement color finds resting restlessness, its form. To me, movement is the true form of a work.

Every dynamic component of form (no matter how minuscule and how limited its energy) has within itself the restlessness to exceed itself, to remain open to its surroundings even though it faces powers of equal strength that offer a continuous boundary.

The restlessness of a line: it wants to be a plane. The restlessness of a plane: it wants to be space.

This restlessness conforms to our painterly sensibility. Lines, surfaces, and space must continually merge with one another; 'cancel out' one another (in the dialectical sense). If this integration is visible, a work vibrates, and our eyes meet with resting restlessness.

Much gets decided at the borderlines of the various components; no less critical, however, is the reaction of color, whose quantity and light intensity are as consequential as the degree of distribution of units of form and their overall relation to the format of the work.

Large parcels of form are to be dispensed with - they cannot become the force of continuous motion. Motion disappears once its momentum disappears.

This way I paint only a profusion of little forms. What about the larger, monumental form? It reappears in the 'overall form' of the work, which is also a momentum of the small form; it is a principle of harmony, the complete integration of color and motion, whose continuous effects overcome the 'sadness of finality'.

An unexpected possibility of making aesthetic motion perceivable arose when I accidentally stepped on a thin piece of metal foil that was lying on a sisal mat. As I picked up the metal foil the light was set to vibrating. Since the rug was made by machine, the imprint was, of course, repetitive and merely decorative. The movement created by the reflected light was insignificant and dull. My metal reliefs, which I would rather call light reliefs, and which are formed by hand, only require light instead of color in order to come alive. Highly polished, a modest relief is sufficient to stir the repose of light and cause it to vibrate. The potential beauty of such a work is a pure expression of the beauty of light.

Heinz Mack, 'Die Ruhe der Unruhe', *ZERO*, Nr. 2, Düsseldorf 1958, 20–23; English translation in *ZERO*, Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, reprint 1973, p. 40–41.



Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, Schall und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero is



opening speech for the fontana exhibition

otto piene

The museum is a conventional institution. Just as conventional is the custom of giving introductory speeches at exhibition openings. We don't want to waste our energies trying to bring about a sudden change in this venerable tradition; in our opinion, there are more important and pressing tasks. For example, I would like to suppose that it would be effective to spend hours of absorption, a day, a night, before pictures by Fontana, relaxed, concentrated, alone—more effective than an interpretation that never overcomes the barrier between language and phenomenon. Let us hope that the future brings us a less circuitous process—for today, however, let us attempt it once again using language. I am not speaking for a group, an organization, a party, a community of interests: I am speaking on my own behalf, subjectively, according to my own skills and abilities.

I regard this first large-scale exhibition of Fontana's works from three decades as an impulse that compels us to undertake an intellectual stocktaking, as an occasion for recognizing our practical, intellectual, and artistic situation and drawing the consequences.

The last sentence of Lucio Fontana's 'manifesto blanco,' drafted in South America and published in 1947 in Italy, is: 'The new art demands the interplay of all the energies of man for its creation and interpretation. Existence reveals itself as unified in the abundance of its life force.' The demand voiced here recalls the frequently pronounced conjecture during the artistic and political discussions of the 1920s that without a 'new man,' without a completely transformed human being, no new state, no new world could come about. The art of the period thus attempted on the one hand to radically dismantle the remnants of the traditionally constituted world. This resulted in an attitude that—if one considers only the effects and not the future intentions still slumbering in the background, for example among the artists of Dada—could be summarized in the sentence: We are against everything! On the other hand, a constructive force also emerged during this decade that manifested itself in the Bauhaus, its personalities and its creations. Our present day requires not an Against for its invigoration, but rather a For. Now that negativity has become an unthinking fashion in our age, I—along with many of my friends—would like to counter the 'against everything' with a 'for everything,' or more precisely a 'for everything that's For.' [...]

In this universe of interests, the artist is something like the last human. If we succeed in turning our situation around into a state of creative openness (reaching the ZERO zone), the living artist then becomes the first human—not only because he paints or cuts through canvases or directs the light, but because he experiences the dynamics of his spirit as something receptive and creative and the unity of the individual as the integration of body and mind. [...]

Lucio Fontana pierces the canvas with a stiletto and with a knife rips open the curtain of prejudices that would have us believe that the world must of necessity be and stay as it is. Behind Fontana's canvas, through it, space opens up.

Is the illusionistic space merely extended here, or is it replaced with real space? As a heightening of the painted space, as an extension of the pictorial space, which is here at once real and unreal, the real space requires the emergence of the imaginary space. The latter likewise takes on through this dual foundation twofold suggestive power: the imagination seizes the body (bodily sensation, balance) of the viewer along with his suggestibility and makes the transformation of the world seem sudden and painful, experienced at the same time as a continuum. Fontana's pictures are at once aggressive and calm, strong and beautiful, revolutionary and classic. They bear witness to a new reality by slicing through the old. Understood as an action, Fontana's painting is tyrannicide; as actual objects (result), his pictures make the new space pulsate; Fontana is the '*ambasciatore dello spazio*.'

Defining this space, which just appears, which is not conceived or calculated, is as impossible as describing freedom. We start to *feel* it here instead.

It's not necessary on this occasion to go into how flying has changed our practical experience of the limits of the dimensions; the question of what this oft-quoted space 'says' to us is meaningless, what significance it has, its dangers due to the way it can falsify the unlimited sense of space—but allow me to at least list four paraphrases I am familiar with:

Space as the dimension of extension
Space as a correlative of time
Space as the dimension of freedom
Space as the dimension of hope
The space – the space
Space

Art is a sensitive barometer of life, an exemplary expression of the elemental present put in concise form, while at the same time, and above all, proclaiming and shaping the future, constantly grasping and creating change. Lucio Fontana destroys in a single, spontaneous, creatively radical act the world of the old pictures and ideas, and hence symbolically the old world of habits entrenched due to fatigue, lack of imagination, or cunning. He cuts into the flesh of stultifying existence as a two-legged creature. In puncturing the decayed and rotten wonders, his fearless action brings a new wonder to the fore: we witness in the sinking of the old order the arising of new possibilities:

lo spazio.

Otto Piene, Introductory speech for the exhibition *Lucio Fontana. Werke aus drei Jahrzehnten* (abridged version), Städtisches Museum Leverkusen/Schloss Morsbroich (January 12, 1962), *Feuilleton*, no. 3 (Stuttgart, 1962).

paths to paradise
otto piene

Yes, I dream of a better world.
Should I dream of a worse?

Yes, I desire a wider world.
Should I desire a narrower?

My dreams are different from songs and sagas. I am working toward their being festive and visible from far off. I am not pining away from longing and resignation because no patron will give me smoke and light. I already have my twelve searchlights, they belong to me. But they are just the beginning, for I would like twelve times twelve, and then more, and they must be strong enough to light up the moon.

The pictures of the old world were equipped with heavy frames, the viewer was forced into the picture, pressed as though through a tube, he had to make himself small to see into this channel; he was brought low to experience the realm of art. Man stood in chains in front of the old pictures and palaces; we needed 5000 years to outdo the Egyptians in building high, we needed 5000 years before we were in a position to build a tower as high as two pyramids —and then we learned to fly. What painting was able to bring as homage to the new state of things was the removal of the obstacle that pictures as well as statuary had



. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der W

formed up till then—for the eye—but it was still in Stygian blackness, bowed down under the ulcers of memory, the superfluities of time past, and the suppurations of the psyche. The portraying of masses turned to the destruction of masses, but mass remained mass as long as man tried to throw light on the world inside him.

One glance at the sky, at the sun, at the sea is enough to show that the world outside man is bigger than that inside him, that it is so immense that man needs a medium to transform the power of the sun into an illumination that is suitable to him, into a stream whose waves are like the beating of his heart. Pictures are no longer dungeons, where mind and body are shackled together, but mirrors whose powers affect man, streams freely pouring forth into space, not ebbing but flooding.

Mind, which is really body, and body, which really exists in mind, does not wish to allow us to treat them as separate entities. I believe that painting elevates man when it corresponds to his physical nature. I believe that there are opposites in the human organism which "cause his heart to beat higher," that there are painted volumes that are so real that they make the lungs fill more deeply and that start up a pulse beat that brings power and rest, contentment and wings to mankind. And my pictures must be brighter than the world around them, unrealistic in the sense that politicians have given to the word. Why must we paint darkness? We have the most complete darkness when we shut our eyes, we do not need to wait for night; night is only relative, we can run before it, and stay always in brightness. The dynamic that man has achieved enables him to overcome the apparently natural basic contrasts. But to praise brightness alone seems to me to be insufficient. I go to darkness itself, I pierce it with light, I make it transparent, I take its terror from it, I turn it into a volume of power with the breath of life like my own body, and I take smoke so that it can fly.

A picture is a skirmish, in which man is directly involved. We treat pictures as neighbors or friends, we have them as sharers of intimacy, and with them we undergo all our experiences, whether pleasant or painful.

Even the biggest, broadest, most expansive picture forces us into close touch with it, draws us to it. A picture is pleasing to a man who has roots, who has a resting place, but is not so pleasing to a wanderer forging through new spaces. What remains of art, of the constructive ability of man, if we look down on the world from above? The pyramids and Cologne Cathedral and all the skyscrapers of America are harmless algae in the sea of the transitory if we put distance between us and them. Centuries shrivel to moments when we think that they will roll on forever. Is not that moment the greater, when man is distance himself, is himself space, that moment when he experiences eternity? The man who uses his body to enclose his mind and his mind to lift up his body, who lives this timeless moment, this heavenly reality, in order to stride freely through space, this man has paradise in him. He follows the beams of light that he creates, they envelop him and the universe, the light passes through him, and he through it.

I have arrived at the light ballet through painting and many other things, through my own methods and instruments. I only heard later that I was the son of half a dozen fathers, whom I did not know as such. Creative work always follows a course different from that in most books. The first steps were like those of a child learning to walk, they were made with full knowledge of this circumstance, it was a controlled archaic; the way in which light reacts to holes through which it is shone is such a complicated business that all those who are working on it at the moment, and those who will occupy themselves with it in

the future, will have their work cut out. I experience with the light ballet similar degrees of sensation to what I feel while painting or looking at finished pictures. By this I do not mean to say that my acquaintance with projections and similar methods is like that with painting, but that it is not so important whether one paints or projects, the subject is not affected so very much—the difference is rather objective: I reach large spaces with articulated lights as media. I am sure that in my lifetime I will not get beyond the real beginnings, that is, assuming that I reach the real beginnings. Thus one will understand that I speak of the present state of the light ballet as archaic. In my imagination, the classical light ballet takes place in a large, perfectly hollow sphere, everyone can see it, can watch it or not, but I need a lot of time to get the searchlights.

My greatest dream is the projection of light into the vast night sky, the probing of the universe as it meets the light, untouched, without obstacles—the world of space is the only one to offer man practically unlimited freedom. (Why is there no art in space, why do we have no exhibitions in the sky? Are a few pilots perhaps artists weaving their perfect patterns in the sky? In the sky there are such enormous possibilities, and we amble along the rows of a museum while our old-fashioned pictures carry out an imaginary march-past!) Up to now we have left it to war to dream up a naive light ballet for the night skies, we have left it up to war to light up the sky with colored signs and artificial and induced conflagrations. Imprisoned mankind achieves wonders defending itself. When will our freedom be so great that we conquer the sky for the fun of it, glide through the universe, live the great play in light and space, without being driven by fear and mistrust? Why do we not pool all human intelligence with the same security that accompanies its efforts in time of war and explode all the atom bombs in the world for the pleasure of the thing, a great display of human inventiveness in praise of human freedom? As a spectator of this astronautic theater, man would not have to take cover, he would be without fear, free, not bound by purpose.

Utopias have a largely literary worth. Utopias with a real basis are not Utopias. My Utopia has a solid foundation: light, smoke, and twelve searchlights!

I have something real to offer. Instead of narrowing the field of vision, instead of absorption, a view of something giving, flowing, pulsating. Not the shrinking of the world in the cells of human imagination, but expansion on every side, the shooting of the viewer into space, where he can breathe deeply of fresh air. In this heaven is paradise on earth.

Otto Piene, "Paths to Paradise," *ZERO* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973 (reprint and translation of the three issues of the journal), 148–149.

on the purity of light

otto piene

Light is the primary condition for all visibility. Light is the sphere of color. Light is the life-substance both of men and of painting. Every color derives its quality from its allotment of light. Light creates the power and magic of a painting, its richness, eloquence, sensuality, and beauty.

Although painting, like a living organism, relies on light for its existence, painters have seldom given light the attention it deserves. We find an inkling of its realization in Etruscan and Pompeian frescoes, in gold grounds and stained-glass windows. Leonardo is the real discoverer. He clothed the raw Renaissance urge

iebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee,

to question with a restrained yet markedly articulate play of light and nonlight; in this Masaccio preceded him. Rembrandt breathed shimmers of reality into the established symbolism of medieval gold grounds. Yet at the same time that he used lights and darks to affirm reality, he used radiance to transcend it. Rembrandt's contemporaries, the Sensualists, confused painting for centuries; they restricted the light of color to the limited role of rendering the illumination of objects. The course of painting seems to have led away from this aberration. It led to Goya, who explored the light of color for its own sake, and on to Turner and to the Impressionists, who at least managed to produce, in their finest and loftiest period, paintings that transformed the ordinary materiality of light, i.e., the rendition of illumination, into light that permitted a more genuine realization of color as a manifestation of the spirit. Van Gogh mastered its force and thereby 'ignited' his work, while Seurat made the clarity of light the medium of the restrained motion in his painting.

Like the revolutions of the Egyptian, Greek, medieval, and modern periods, the revolution of contemporary art seems forced to renounce the wealth of choices. Freedom has been corrupted by fear of the multiplicity of relationships of the sensual and, hence, of the experience of light. Consequently, Delaunay and many works by Severini and Balla have no direct successors. The world of art is so fascinated by the brittleness of signs and planes that it is felt that the proper concern of painting is the flat plane and its inhabitant, form.

Pollock's action painting and the obvious mysticism of Wols's work have their origin in the revolution against the Revolution. The Informel movement inspired by them has given painting back its élan vital. The price of this victory was extraordinarily high: it was the renunciation of the concept of purity of color, a concept that, although it was advocated more than fifty years ago, was never completely realized. Color could not become pure because one indispensable condition had been overlooked: purity of light.

The light of color flows between the work and the spectator and fills the space between them. This space cannot be quantified because the spatial properties of the work are irrational—the work 'as space' is irrational. The legitimate fear among modern artists of the occurrence of spatial illusion as it had appeared in art between 1500 and 1900 caused them to reduce pictorial space to near-nothingness, because given the intentions of classically-tempered modern art, the continuity of space in paintings could not be maintained otherwise. The static character of forms available to modern art paralyzed both light and color.

In order to achieve its dynamic, Informel painting does not hesitate to readopt or merely place matter in front of the old, perspectival space that appears to open up behind the picture plane. Consequently, no dynamic continuum can be formed; an Informel work is only frozen movement, a report on movement that has occurred in the past. Just as fatal is the kind of subtle shading of color in various greys, which leads to an old-style valeur painting. The seamlessness of the resulting pictorial blendings is an imitation of nature. The aficionados of richly associative painting are delighted by this creation that represents nature in a seemingly established, final stage; after all, a static interpretation of nature is a pessimistic interpretation, and, to the fans, to be pessimistic is to be contemporary.

Although no one today seriously doubts that even the most restrained paintings are an expression of human thought and feeling, it appears as if language and painting have gone their separate ways. Actually, their relationship is more

intimate than ever before, because they have to rely upon one another. For instance, language serves to interpret painting. If one takes this relationship seriously, paintings created out of an initial dependence on tachism are an expression of a pessimism that with a melancholy matter-of-factness takes human misery for granted. The believers seek to derive an aesthetic stimulus from their pessimism.

The common idea that a painter should express his own times is naive insofar as it reduces the painter to a kind of journalist. The artist does respond to his environment, but his response is creative in that it refers more to the future than to the present. Today, as always, every art has its moral side. The platonic ideal, that the beautiful is both good and true, has not been forgotten. A painting that achieves its potential simultaneously fosters a conviction. The art that is created most of all as art and that renounces the directness of actual report will have the greatest meaning; that is, man will find his aesthetic sensibility to be the doorway to his spiritual self.

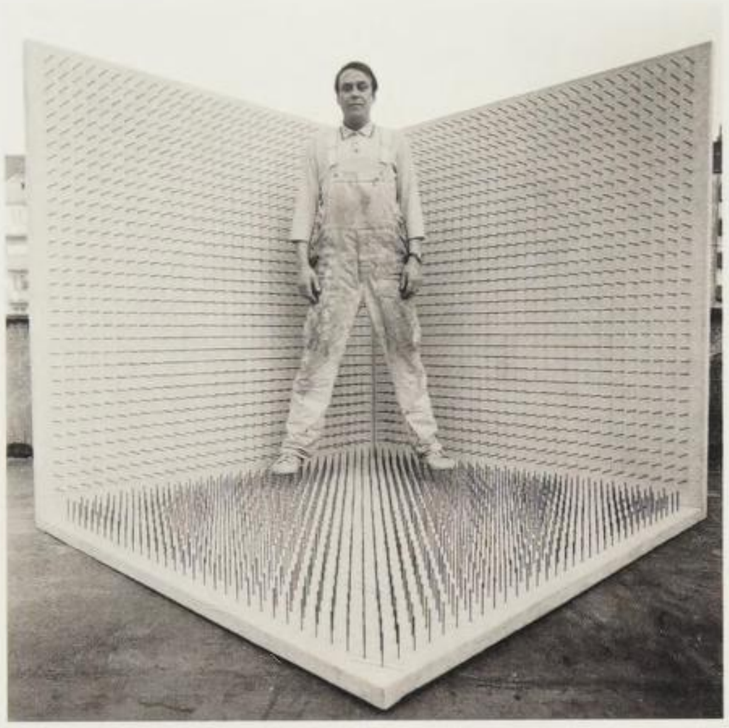
Drabness of color is an expression of man's own drabness, of drabness of consciousness in the broadest sense, and it suggests this drabness to the spectator, too. To deny this would mean for art to give up its exemplary capacity. Purity of light, which creates pure color, which in turn is an expression of the purity of light, takes hold of all men with its continuous flow of rhythmic current between painting and observer; this current, under certain formal conditions, becomes a forceful pulse beat, total vibration. The vitality of color is in its persuasive power. The energy of light emanating from the field of the painting is converted mysteriously into the spectator's vital energy.

The means have been found to give painting so much sensuality (while still retaining its discipline) by virtue of light that it will depart from the rational explicability of signs and symbols and enter the realm of painterly beauty, in which the course of spirit is guided by the senses. Painting will achieve a beaming intensity, it will radiate to man. The purity of light will enable painting to arouse pure feeling.

Otto Piene, 'On the purity of light,' in *ZERO 2* (Düsseldorf, 1958); Reprint of *ZERO 1-3, Heinz Mack und Otto Piene* (Cologne, 1973), 46.



Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist



untitled
günther uecker

Our projects of today are the realities of tomorrow.

Whatever exists in our imagination is an integral part of ourselves.

Experience is imagination carried over into the sensual sphere.

Immediate experience comes only when we ourselves participate. To obtain widest participation, the production of art must cease to be limited to the individual, as it has been till now.

Technology as a medium of composition offers great possibilities in the formulation of aesthetic information.

Since imitative values cannot arise here, originality is unimpaired. Thus the creative element in the phenomenon of movement is preserved.

To render the development of a movement visible as a dynamic state is a significant action. It is not a matter of routine but fertile in its repetition, in its very monotony, like the experience of prayer.

My objects constitute a spatial reality, a zone of light. I use the means of technology to overcome the personal gesture, to objectify, to create the conditions for freedom.

Günther Uecker, untitled, *ZERO* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973 (reprint and translation of the three issues of the journal), 220.

on white
günther uecker

A painter could be said to make a picture with white paint.

This 'white' could be a pigment obtained by oxidization: such as zinc white, lead white or titanium white. The powder is mixed with resin, applied to a canvas and rhythmically shaped.

Expressing the phenomenon like this is based on a materialist view that assumes everything is static and can be changed by people. But I will try to see the question differently for once.

It is undeniable that white has a very enchanting effect, whether on a plane, looking down on what you see from a great height; whether snow in winter; or on a

canvas. Every artist first feels an immense respect for white; as you know yourself and can be confirmed by other artists. I have often heard it suggested that before beginning to paint you should first cover the page with white, because otherwise the whiteness of the page will spoil subjective emotions and their results.

Although Picasso usually accepted white, he painted an abstract, humanist form of existence. Black became the color that absorbed, that demanded light. In his work, Malevich gave this substance through a black square on a white ground. For the Monists, whom we know as 'monks', and in diverse cultures white was regarded as 'eradication of the boundary between being and non-being and the emergence of a new being' and 'experiencing pure being'; and this was an objective to be achieved. As an environment, the environment of mystical being, white is found in the cells of Christian monks and in the buildings where societies subject to Islamic culture that forbids any images of man or God congregate throughout their lives. The first monotonous Gregorian chants attempted to express 'White' in the course of prayer. Singing for the purpose of meditation, repeating and modulating the same tone, can carry people into a mystical realm and enable them to be absorbed by it.

In the context of Buddhism, the perspective acquired through efforts to learn to experience 'emptiness' is acquired not by written prayers and abstract environments, but by people becoming sensitive enough to ignore themselves, and reaching a state where they can imagine nothing.

Yves Klein gave us the sense of an area of Emptiness through Iris Clert's 'The Void' and the Theatre of the Void that Klein himself created in Paris. This performance had a major impact on many artists, who viewed White as a new vehicle of expression that was able to convey their mystical experiences. Here a person is seen as a whole; he is able to transcend this language and enter into it, so enabling him to participate in the creative process of the artist and the happenings between himself and what the artist is trying to explain.

Here there is no need for a person to establish a connection with his likeness in a picture; he can experience a visual phenomenon within himself without anything being conveyed.

Where my work is concerned, here you see a light staccato, a decipherable white area that through its finesse stirs the sensitivity within us. This opens the doors to a brand new world formed of slight nuances, enabling us to go beyond all the commotion to encounter silence.

Stephan von Wiese, *Uecker: Schriften, Gedichte – Projektbeschreibungen – Reflexionen*, St. Gallen, 1979, pp. 104-105.

whiteness
günther uecker

Viewing today's structural forms carries us to a new reality. It can clearly be seen that our environment, due to the productions of human society, is very different from the social output of the past. This truth makes us realize that the vehicles produced belong to people. Today, seeing objects whose rustiness reveals that they belong to the past, as representatives of past cultures that should be remembered, does not mean that these are misunderstood. These should not lead us to an art of rustiness, darkness and decay. Through our awareness, we can express ourselves by producing in a creative way in an existing environment, and if we can exist in this environment, we can achieve this. The purest vehicles created in this environment carry us to an entirely

new form of expression and evolution in which we can experience mystical freedom.

My 'white structures' (*Weissstrukturen*), which I deliberately call 'objects', since they are different from paintings on canvas, are formed of already produced elements such as nails. At first I used definite measurements and mathematical patterns, but these gradually unraveled and were transformed into a free rhythm. Later I endeavored to make these white structures turn into a waving movement or vibration through changes in light, and so achieve a light integration that could be seen as a free, expressive environment of light. Finally I decided on a white area and my aim was that this should express the most advanced form of colorfulness, the zenith of light, and the victory of light over darkness. I believe that a white world is a human world. People experience colorful being in this world and can be alive. These white structures can be a mystical language in which we can begin to meditate. Whiteness can be seen as a prayer and a mystical way of life with respect to its form of expression.

There is a difference between darkness and existence in whiteness, and between cries that are the expression of awareness of being, and large scale gestures and dramas that represent pains and move salvation to the next world. I think about a reality that is in the present and which harbors the value of infinity within its own dynamic. According to the way we move, and whichever cognitive dimension we move in, we will find an environment in which we can escape from the confines of artistic culture and breathe more freely.



o dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orang



my position in the battle between line and color

yves klein

The art of painting consists, in my opinion, of restoring matter to its primordial state. An ordinary picture, as it is generally conceived, seems to me like the window of a prison, where the lines, contours, forms, and composition are determined by the bars. The way I see it, lines embody our mortal state, our emotional life, our power of reasoning and even our spirituality. They are our psychological boundaries, our history, our education and skeleton, our flaws and wishes, our powers and our stratagems.

Color, on the other hand, is more natural and human, it bathes in cosmic sensitivity. Pictorial sensitivity, unlike what line would tend to make us believe, is not filled with hidden nooks and crannies. It is like the moisture in the air; color is nothing but sensitivity turned into matter, matter in its primordial state.

I can no longer approve of a 'legible' picture; my eyes are not made to read a picture, but rather to see it. Painting is COLOR, and van Gogh exclaimed: 'I want to be liberated from I don't know what prison.' I think he subconsciously suffered from seeing color cut up by line and its consequences.

Colors are the real dwellers of space, whereas lines merely travel through space and streak it. They streak the infinite, while color is. Through color I feel a total identification with space; I am truly free!

During my second Parisian exhibit at Colette Allendy's in 1956, I displayed a selection of PROPOSITIONS in varied colors and sizes. What I expected from the public was this 'moment of truth' of which Pierre Restany spoke in his text for my exhibit. In feeling free to remove this impure external encumbrance and to achieve that degree of contemplation where art becomes full and pure sensibility. Unfortunately, it became obvious from reactions to this display that many observers, caught in their habitual way of seeing, were far more receptive to the relationship of the PROPOSITIONS to each other and re-created the elements of a decorative and architectural multicolored design.

After this, I was moved to continue my research one step further and to show, this time in Milan in the Gallery Apollinaire, an exhibit dedicated to what I dared to call my 'blue period' (in fact, I had been concentrating on the search for the most perfect expression of blue for more than a year). This exhibit consisted of ten blue pictures, dark ultramarine, all of them exactly alike in tone, value,

proportion, and size. The impassioned controversy following this exhibit and the deep emotion among open-minded persons who were ready to escape the stifling effects of well-known representations and deep-rooted rules showed me the importance of the phenomenon.

Although I live in the midst of errors, naïvetés, and utopias, I am happy to be dealing with a problem that is so much of our time. One must—and this is not an exaggeration—keep in mind that we are living in the atomic age, where everything material and physical could disappear from one day to another, to be replaced by nothing but the ultimate abstraction imaginable. For me there exists a sensitive artistic color material that is intangible. Thus I have pondered whether even color, in its physical aspect, has become finally for me also a limit and a hindrance to my effort to create perceptible pictorial states.

In order to reach Delacroix's 'indéfinissable,' the very essence of painting, I have embarked on the 'specialization' of space, which is my ultimate way of treating color. It is no longer a matter of seeing color but of perceiving it.

My recent work with color has led me progressively and unwillingly to search for the realization of matter with some assistance (of the observer, of the translator), and I have decided to end the battle. My paintings are now invisible and these I would like to show in my next Parisian exhibit at Iris Clert's, in a clear and positive manner.

Yves Klein, 'My Position in the Battle between Line and Color (1958),' *ZERO* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973 (reprint and translation of the three issues of the journal), 10–11.



free dimension
piero manzoni

The emergence of new conditions and the appearance of new problems imply, together with the necessity of new solutions, new methods and new terms of measurement. One does not leave the ground merely by running and jumping; wings are required. Modifications are not sufficient; the transformation must be integral.

It is for this reason that I am unable to understand the painters who, whilst declaring themselves to be interested in modern problems, even today look at a painting as if it is a surface to be filled with color and forms in accordance with a taste which can be more or less appreciated and which is more or less trained. They trace in a line, stand back, look at their work with head tilted to one side and with squinting eye, then jump forward once again and add another line or another color from the palette; and these gymnastics continue until the canvas is filled up, covered. The painting is thus completed and a surface with limitless possibilities is finally reduced to a sort of recipient into which unnatural colors and artificial significance are forced and compressed. Why not empty, instead, this recipient? Why not liberate the surface? Why not attempt to discover the limitless significance of total space, of pure and absolute light?

Allusion, expression and representation are non-existent problems today—and I wrote about this some years ago—whether one is dealing with objects, facts, ideas or dynamic or inert phenomena. A painting has value in as much as it is a totality. There is no need to say anything. It is only necessary to exist. Two tones of the same color or two blended colors already have a relationship that is extraneous to the significance of the surface, which is unique, limitless, absolutely dynamic. The infinitability is rigorously monochrome, or better still, of no color. (In fact, hasn't a monochrome, since it lacks all relation to color, already become colorless?) Artistic criticism, which makes use of concepts like composition and form, has no value; form, color and dimensions have no sense in total space. The artist has achieved integral freedom; pure material becomes pure energy; the obstacles of the space, the slavery to subjective foibles are annihilated; all problems of artistic criticism are surmounted; everything is permitted.

I find it quite incomprehensible, therefore, that the artist rigorously lays down today the limits of a surface on which to arrange forms and colors in exact

relationships and in strict equilibrium. Why should one be bothered by the problem of disposing a line in space? Why delimit a space? Why such limitation? All such problems like composition of form, form in space and spatial profundity are extraneous to us; a line can only be traced without limits of length into infinity and beyond any problem of composition or dimension. Dimension does not exist in total space.

All problems of color and all questions of chromatic relationships are also useless, even if one is only dealing with tonal modulations. We can only utilize a single color or, rather, utilize a single uninterrupted and continuous surface from which anything superfluous and all interpretative possibilities are excluded. It is not a question of 'painting' blue on blue or white on white either in the sense of composing or in the sense of expressing oneself. Quite the contrary. The question for me is that of creating an integrally white surface (yes, integrally colorless, neutral), which is completely unrelated to any pictorial phenomenon or to any element that is extraneous to the value of the surface. It is a white that is not a polar landscape, or a beautiful or evocative material, or a sensation, or a symbol, or anything else; it is a white surface that is nothing else but a white surface (a colorless surface that is nothing else but a colorless surface). Or better still it exists, and that is sufficient. It is, and to be totally pure is becoming. This indefinite surface, uniquely alive, even if in the material contingency the work cannot be infinite, is, however, infinitable, infinitely repeatable, without a solution of continuity. And that is even more apparent in the 'lines,' for in these there no longer exists the possible ambiguity of the 'painting.' The line develops only in length and extends towards infinity. The only dimension is time. And it hardly needs to be said that a 'line' is not a horizon or a symbol and it has value not as something beautiful but in the degree to which it exists. (The same is true of a blotch; it has value in the degree to which it is a blotch and not in the degree to which it is beautiful or evocative; but in this case the surface has only value as a medium).

The same may be said for bodies of air (pneumatic sculpture), which are reducible or extensible from a minimum of nothing to a maximum of infinity; they are absolutely undetermined spheroids, because every attempt to give them a form (even formless) is both illegitimate and illogical. It is not a question of formation and it is not a question of expression (nor can one turn to extraneous problems like parascientific complexities, psychoanalytical secrecies, graphic composition, ethnographical phantasy, etc.). Aren't perhaps expression, phantasy and abstraction empty fictions? There is nothing further to add: there is only to be, to live.

Piero Manzoni, 'Free Dimension,' in *Azimuth 2: La nuova concezione artistica*, Milano, 1960.

Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. D

themes

time & space

LUCIO FONTANA >

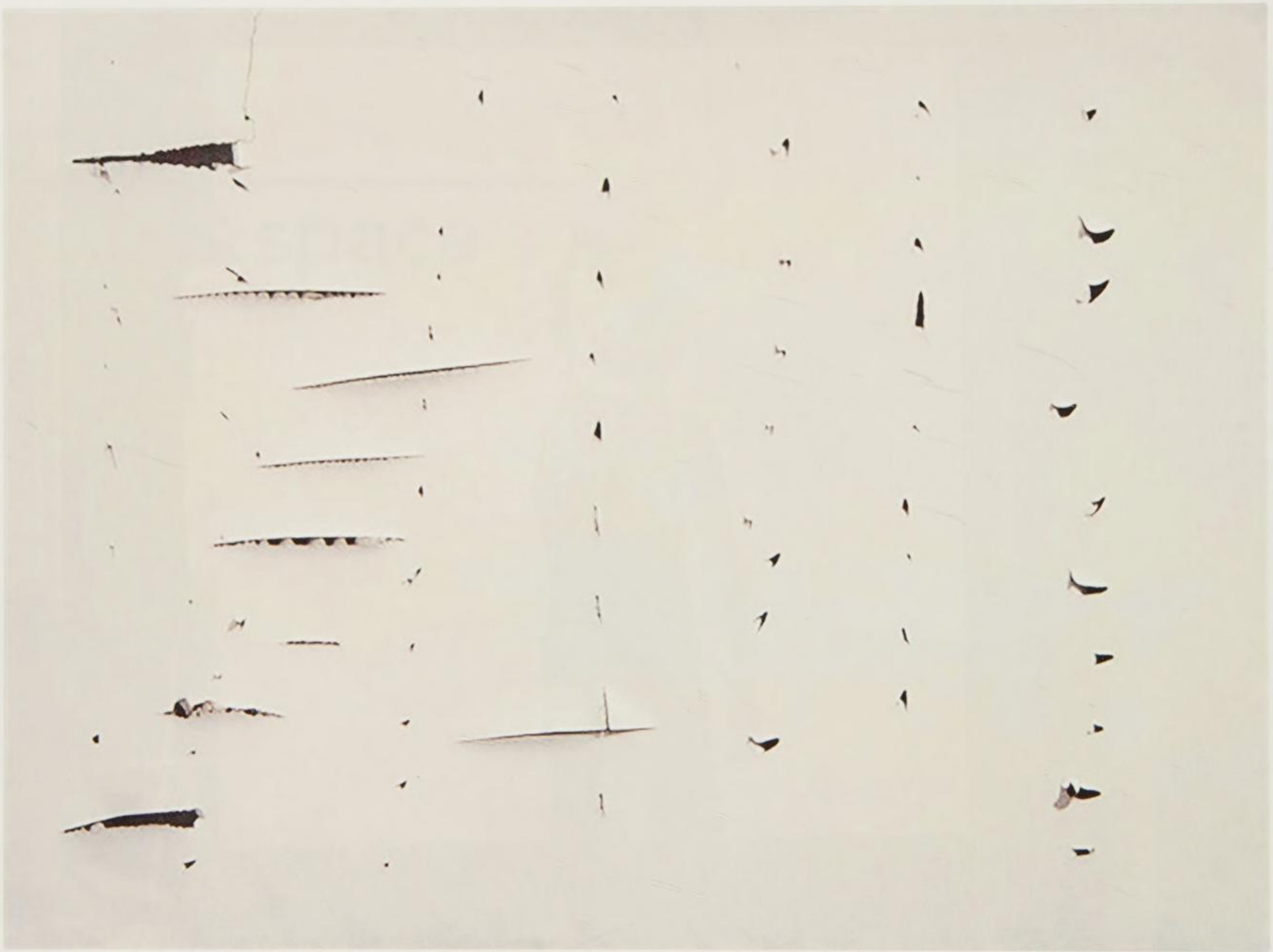
Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Vogel. Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trin



ch schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo

lucio fontana

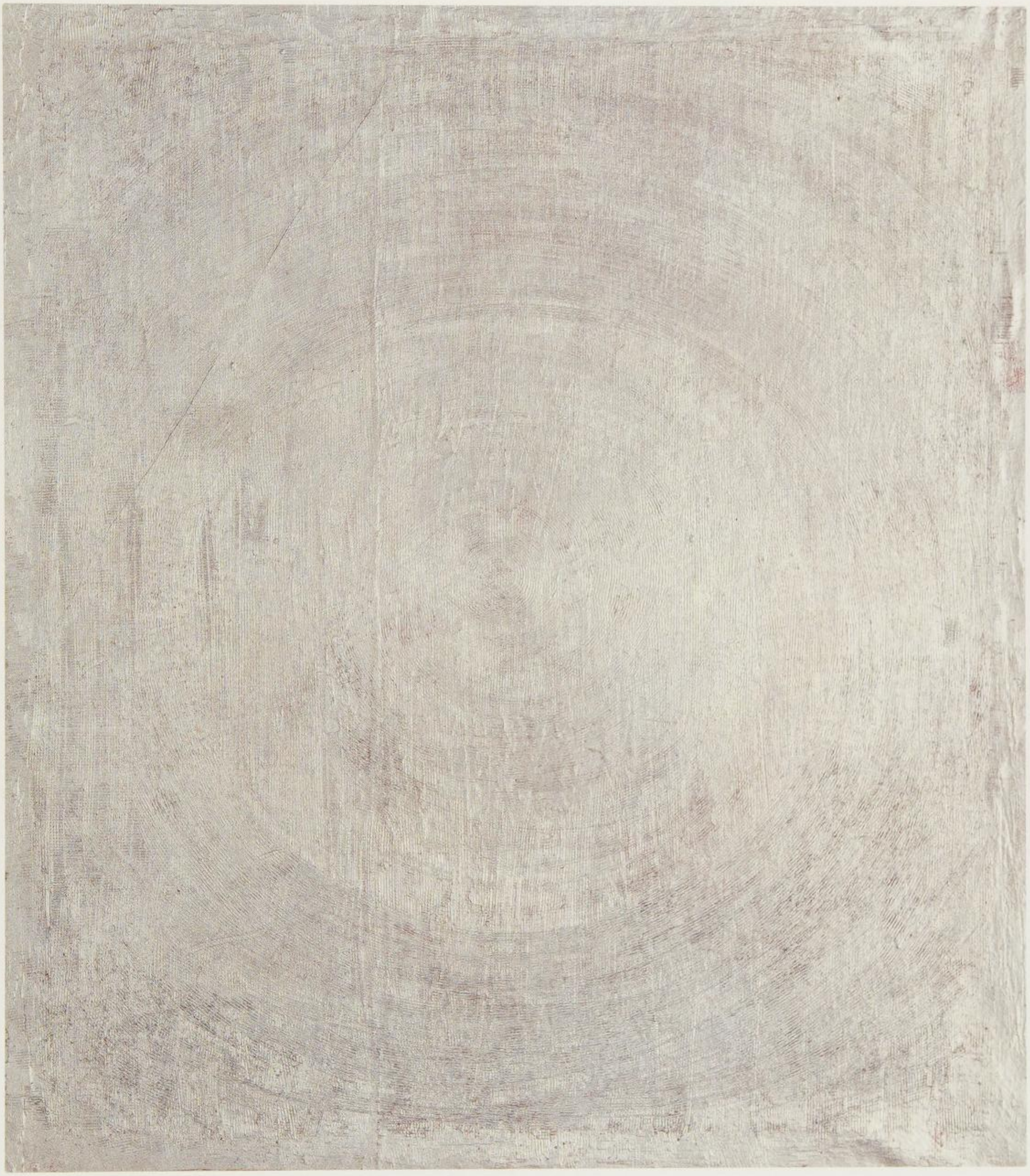
Concetto Spaziale, 1957 – 1958
Spatial Concept, 1957 – 1958
Incisions on paper canvas
97 x 130 cm
Private Collection, London



Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo bla

günther uecker

Silberspirale, 1957
Silver Spiral, 1957
Silver aluminum on canvas
116 x 101 cm
Private Collection



lucio fontana

Concetto Spaziale , 1957 – 1958
Spatial Concept, 1957 – 1958
Incisions on paper canvas
96 x 130 cm
Ben Brown Fine Arts, London



Zero. Zero ist rund. Zero ist Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero

heinz mack

Sandbild mit Silberrotation, 1958
Sand Picture with Silver Rotation, 1958
Sand and silver aluminum on canvas mounted on wooden panel
102 x 91 cm
The Schaufler Foundation, Sindelfingen



n. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel üb

lucio fontana

Concetto Spaziale, Natura, 1959 – 1960
Spatial Concept, Nature, 1959 – 1960
Bronze
Ø 65 cm
Rira Collection



Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die

lucio fontana

Concetto Spaziale, Natura, 1959 – 1960
Spatial Concept, Nature, 1959 – 1960
Bronze
Ø 75 cm
Rira Collection



lucio fontana

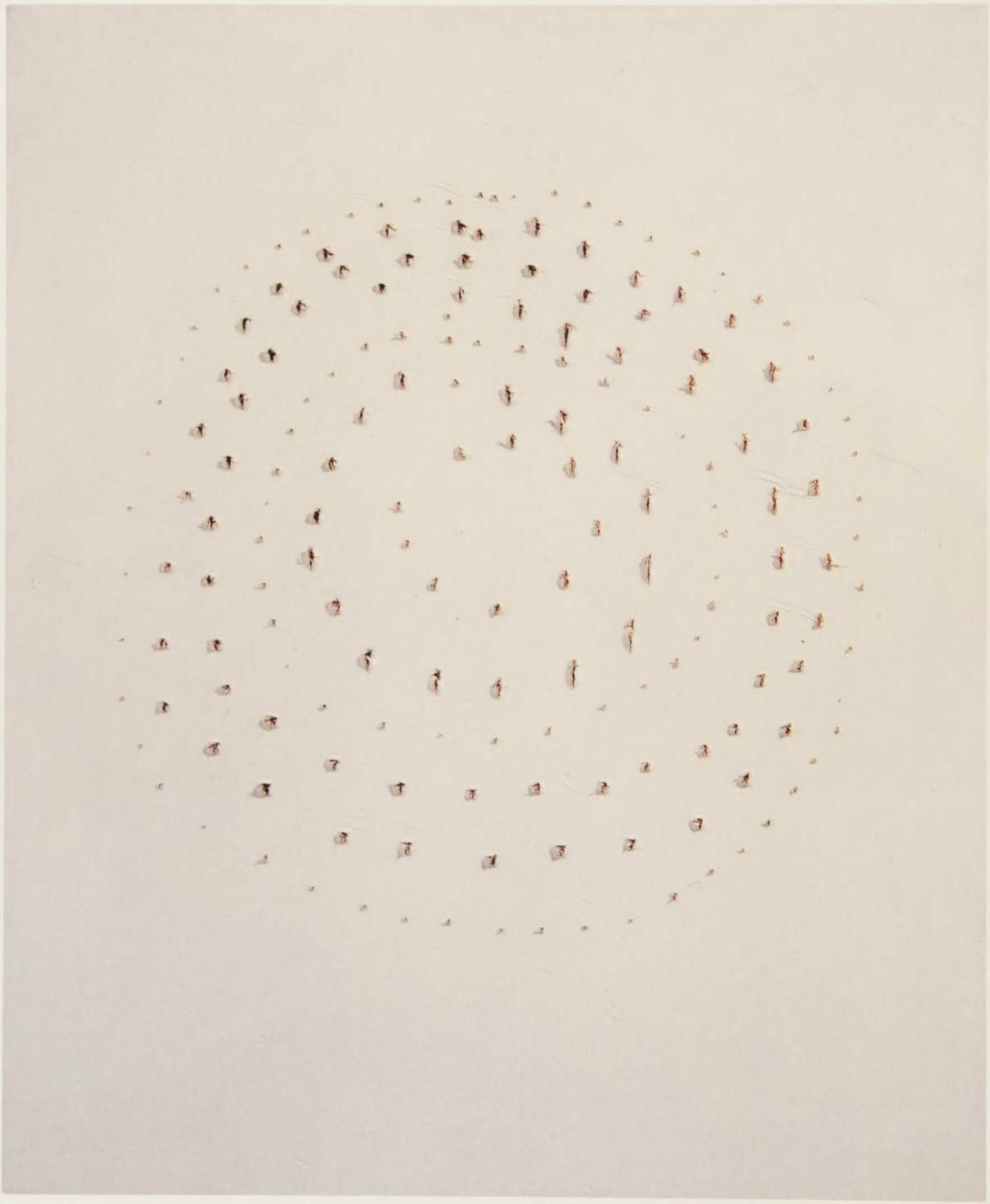
Concetto Spaziale, Natura, 1959 – 1960
Spatial Concept, Nature, 1959 – 1960
Bronze
Ø 66 cm
Rira Collection



der Vogel. Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ic

lucio fontana

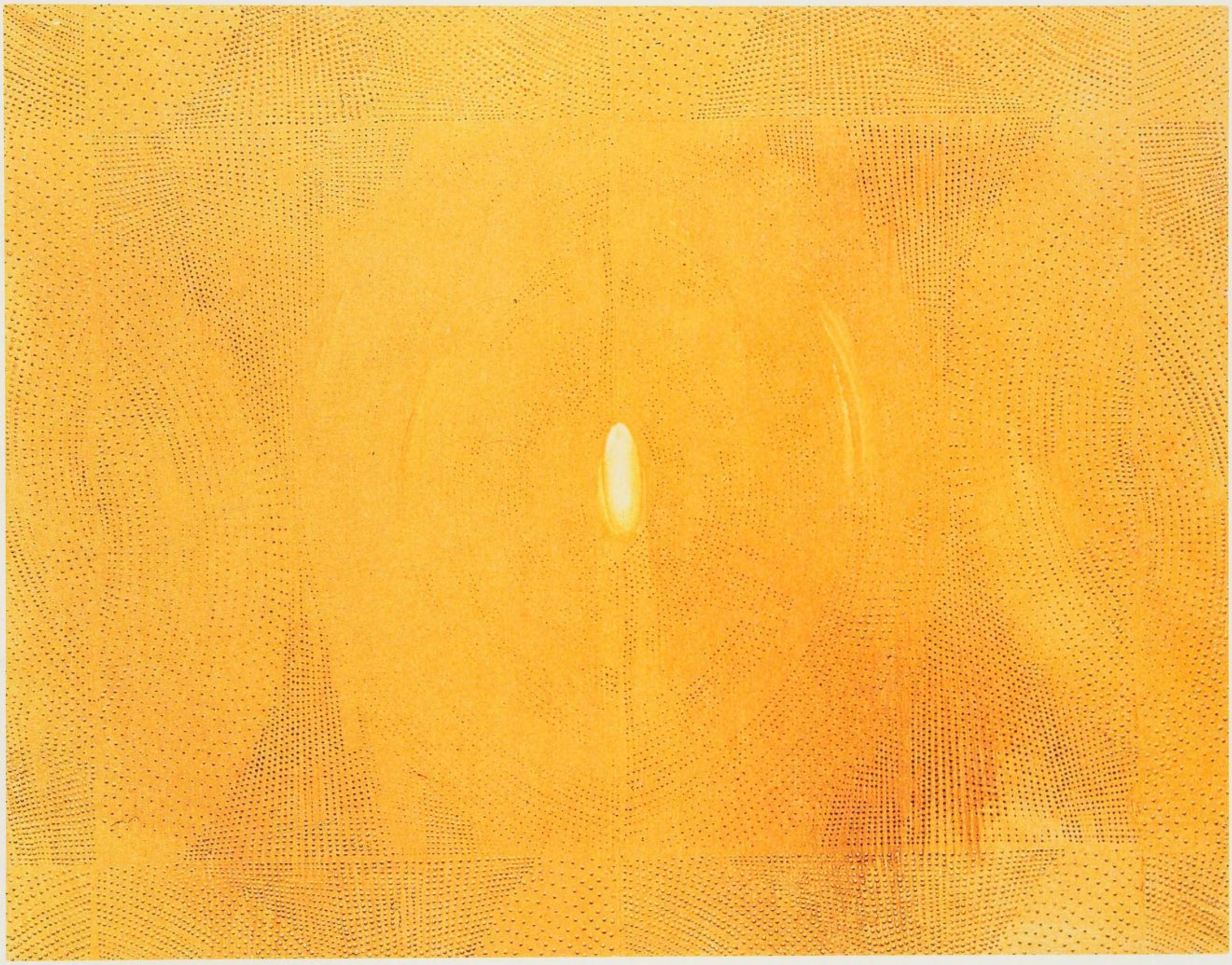
Concetto Spaziale, 1960 – 1961
Spatial Concept, 1960-1961
Oil and watercolor on perforated canvas
85 x 70 cm
Rira Collection



vache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frü

otto piene

Gelbgelbweißheißschnell, 1958
Yellowyellowwhitehotquickly, 1958
Stencil painting, oil on canvas
127 x 162 cm
Lenz Schönberg Söll Collection



er Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zer

color

YVES KLEIN >

egenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, Schall und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero ist r



ist Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist de

yves klein

Monochrome Bleu sans titre (*IKB 46*), 1955
Untitled Blue Monochrome (*IKB 46*), 1955
Dry pigment and synthetic resin on
canvas mounted on plywood
66 x 46 cm
Private Collection



Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nach

yves klein

Monochrome rose sans titre (MP 17), c. 1957
Untitled Pink Monochrome, (MP 17), c. 1957
Dry pigment and synthetic resin on gauze mounted on panel
50 x 35 cm
Marianne and Viktor Langen Collection, Neuss



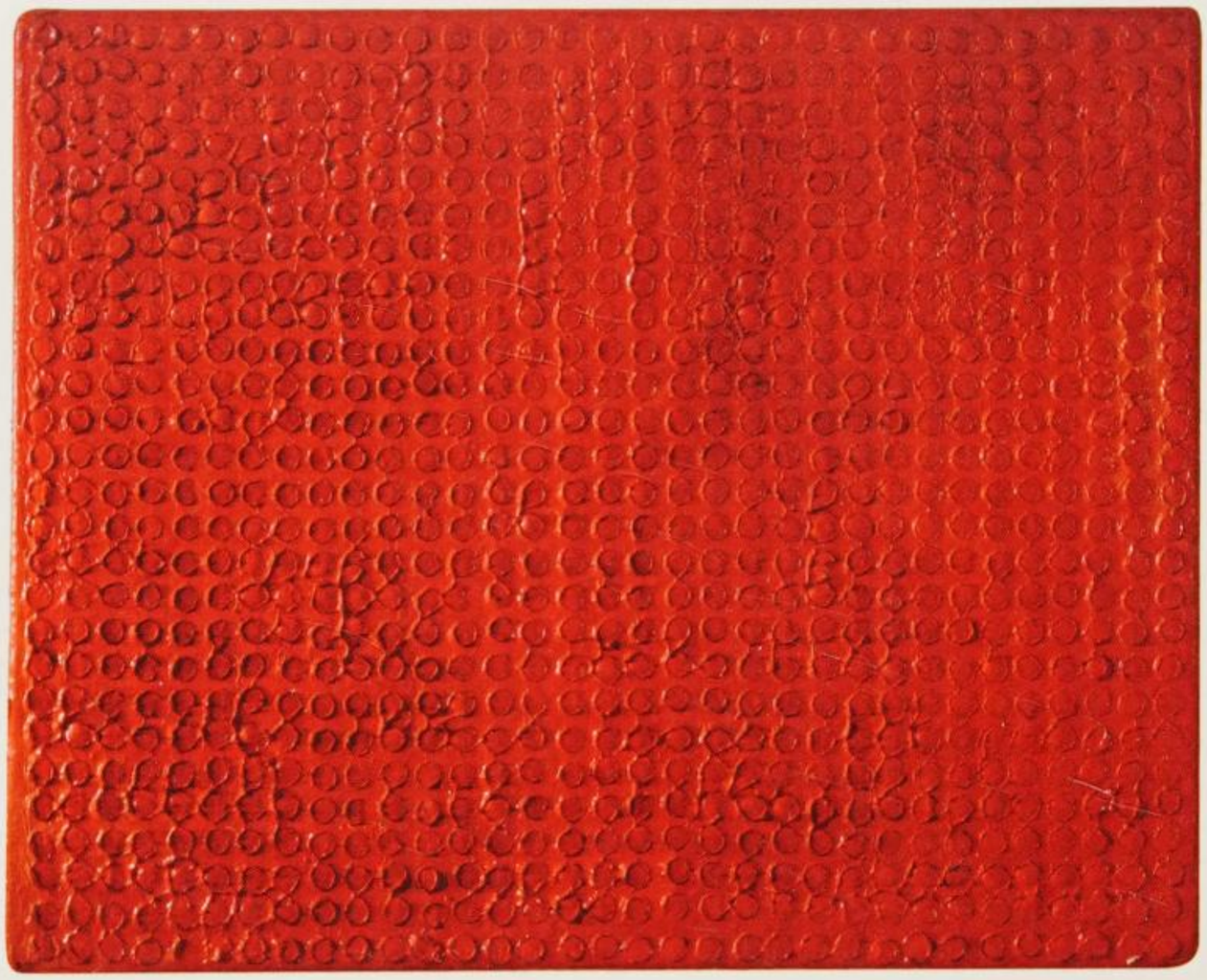
fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Voge

otto piene

Rasterbild, 1958
Rasterpainting, 1957
Oil on canvas
25 x 30 cm
Helga and Edzard Reuter Collection, Stuttgart

yves klein

Monochrome Rouge sans titre (M83), 1958
Untitled Red Monochrome (M 83), 1957
Dry pigment and synthetic resin on ceramic
H. 3 cm, Ø 24 cm
Elizabeth Goldring Piene and Otto Piene Estate, Groton

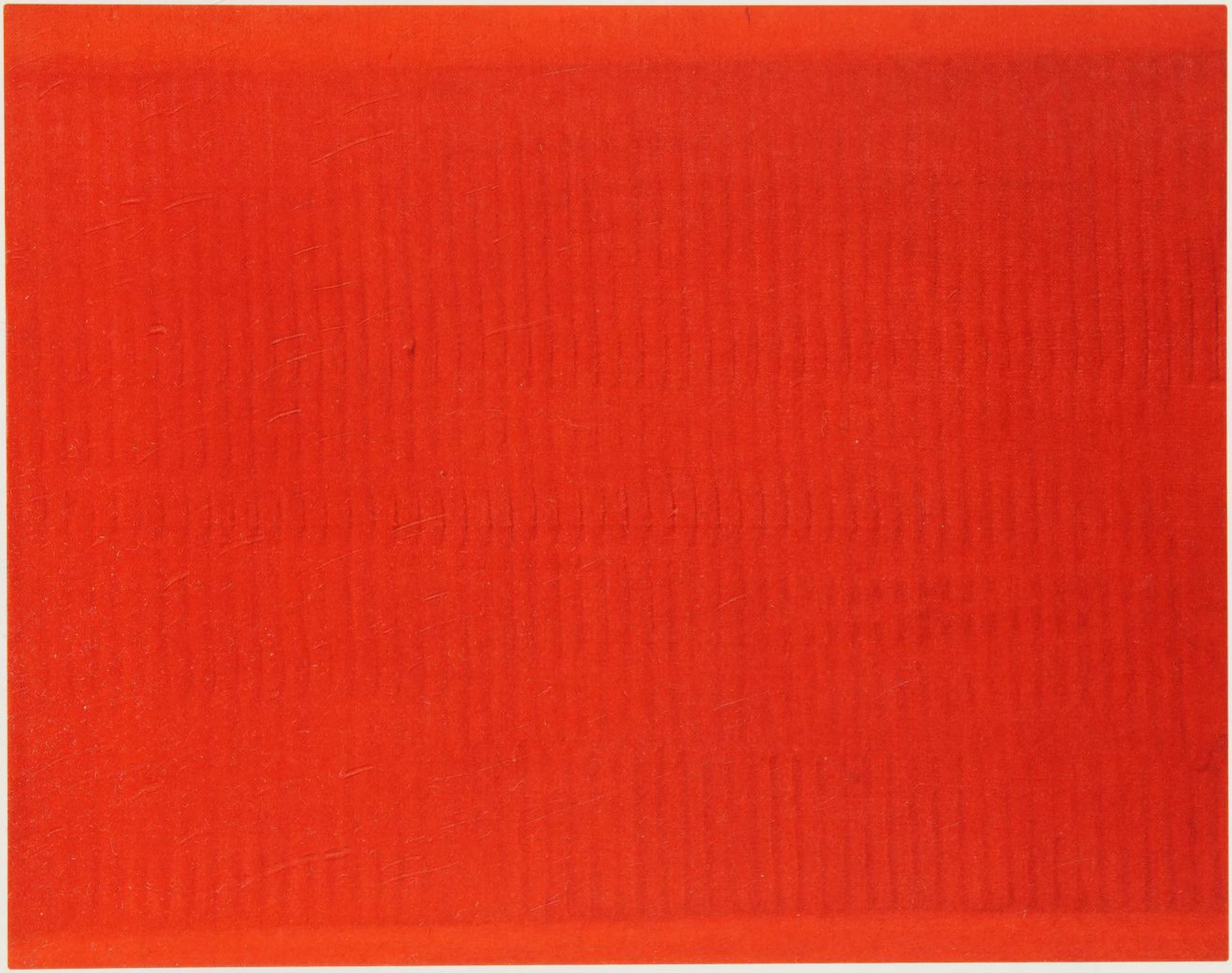




chweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, i

heinz mack

Ohne Titel (Rote dynamische Stuktur), 1958
Untitled (Red Dynamic Structure), 1958
Synthetic resin on canvas
64 x 82 cm
Studio Mack



ero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feue

günther uecker

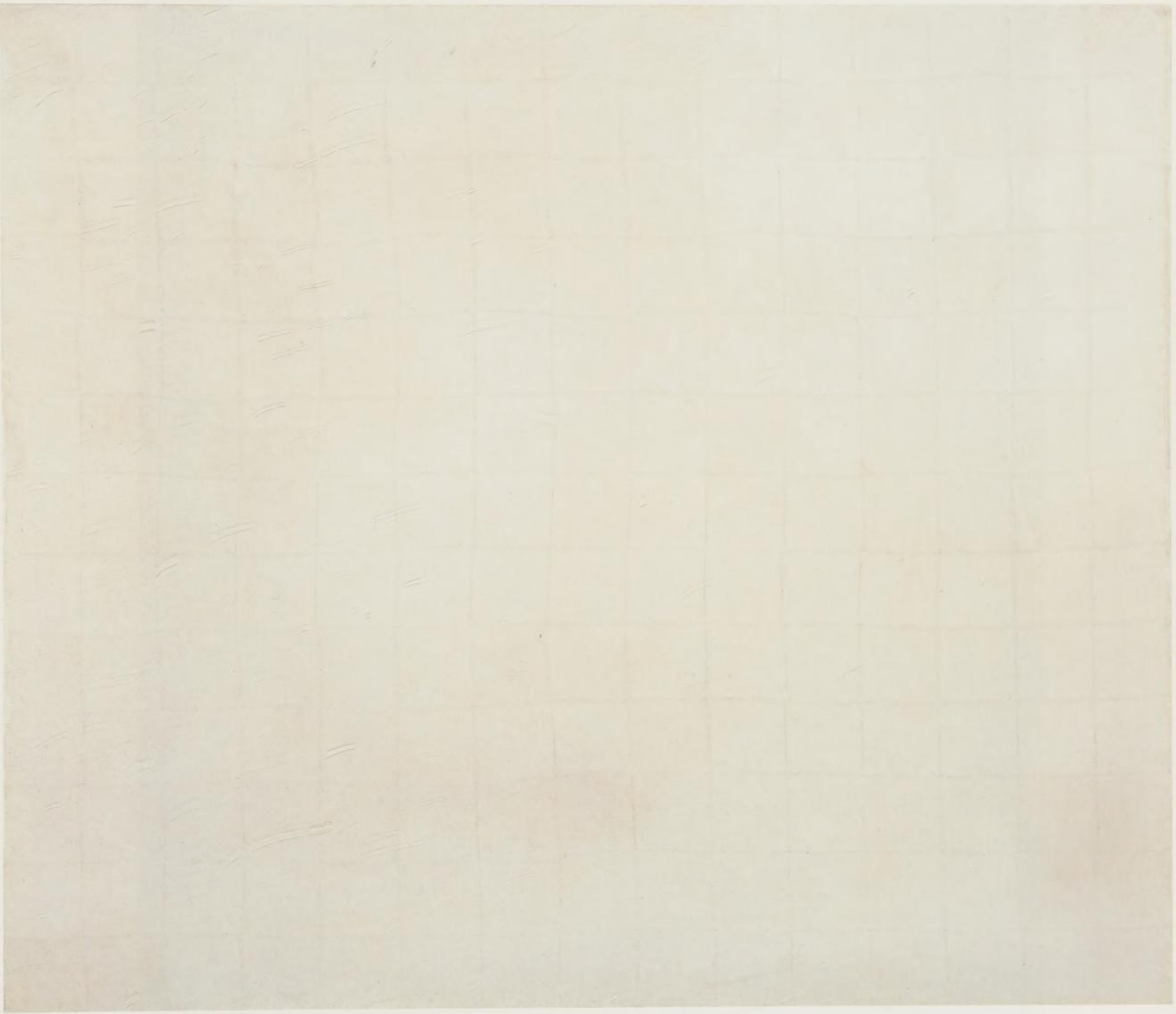
Rotes Bild, 1958
Red Painting, 1958
Oil on canvas
69.5 x 55 cm
Private Collection



Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2

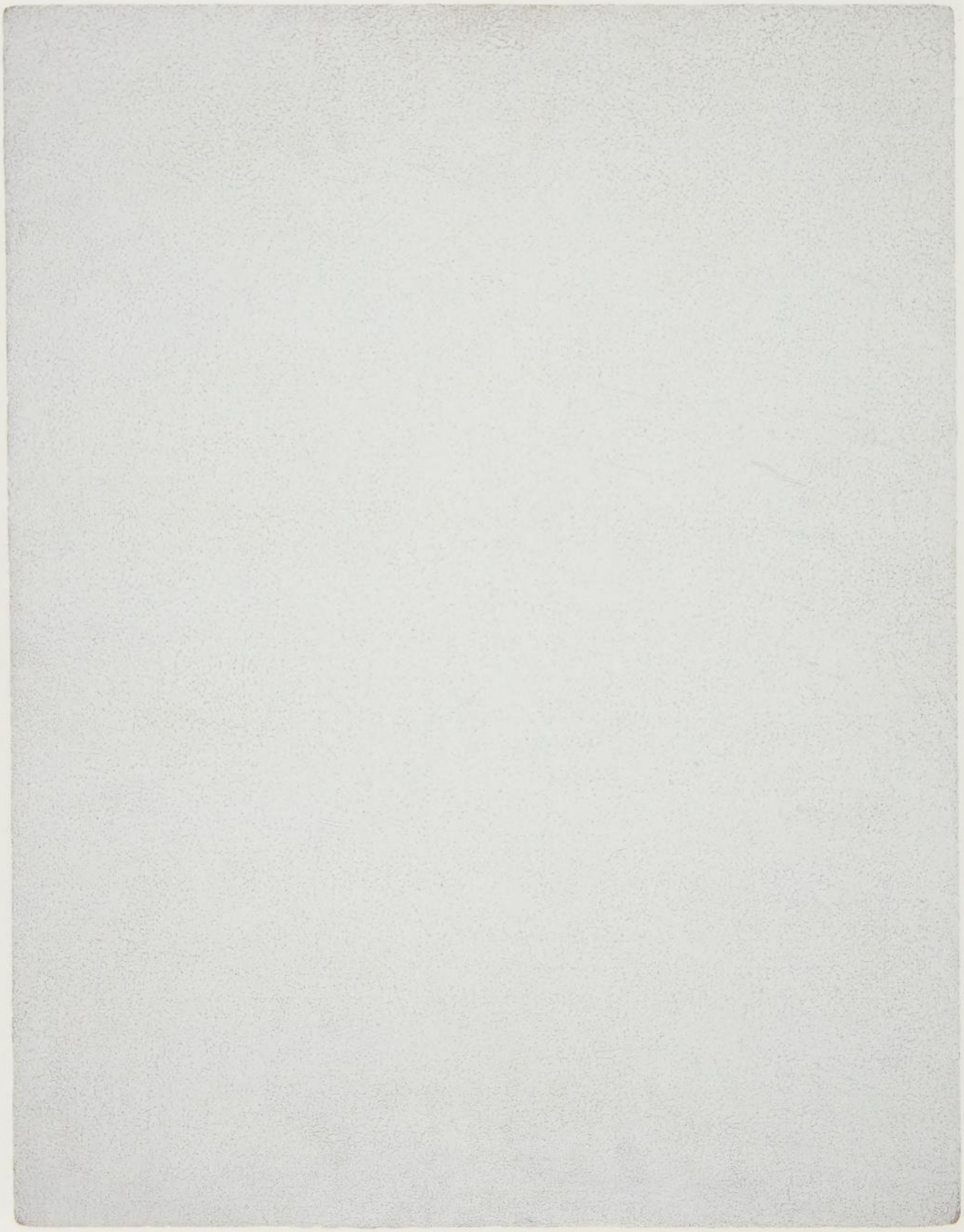
piero manzoni

Achrome, 1959 – 1960
Kaolin on stitched canvas
130 x 150 cm
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie
Purchased by the State of Berlin.



yves klein

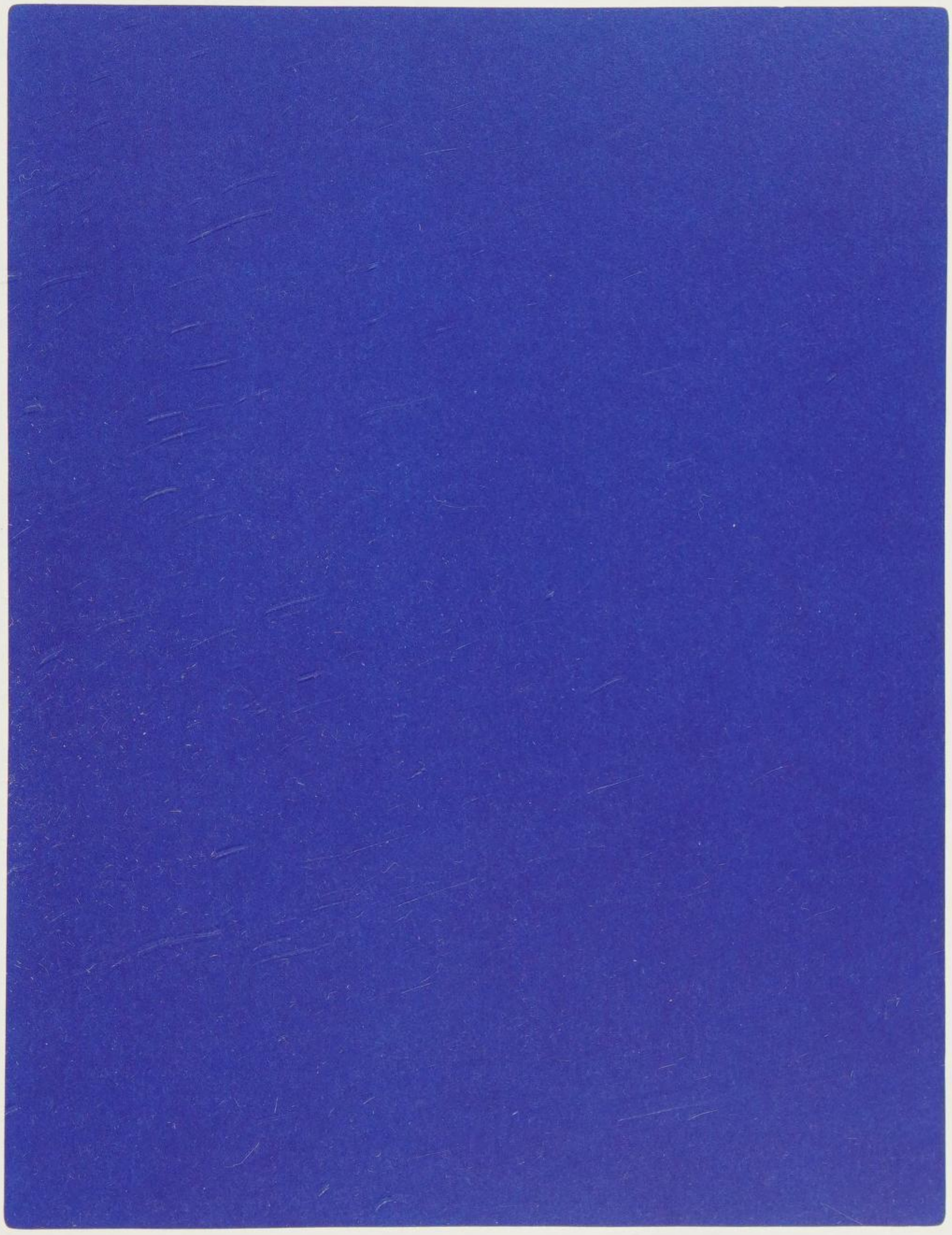
Monochrome blanc sans titre (M 33), 1958
Untitled White Monochrome (M 33), 1958
Dry pigment and synthetic resin on gauze mounted on panel
64.5 x 50 cm
Private Collection



die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonn

yves klein

California (IKB 69), 1961
Dry pigment and synthetic resin on gauze mounted on panel
194.5 x 140 cm
Private Collection

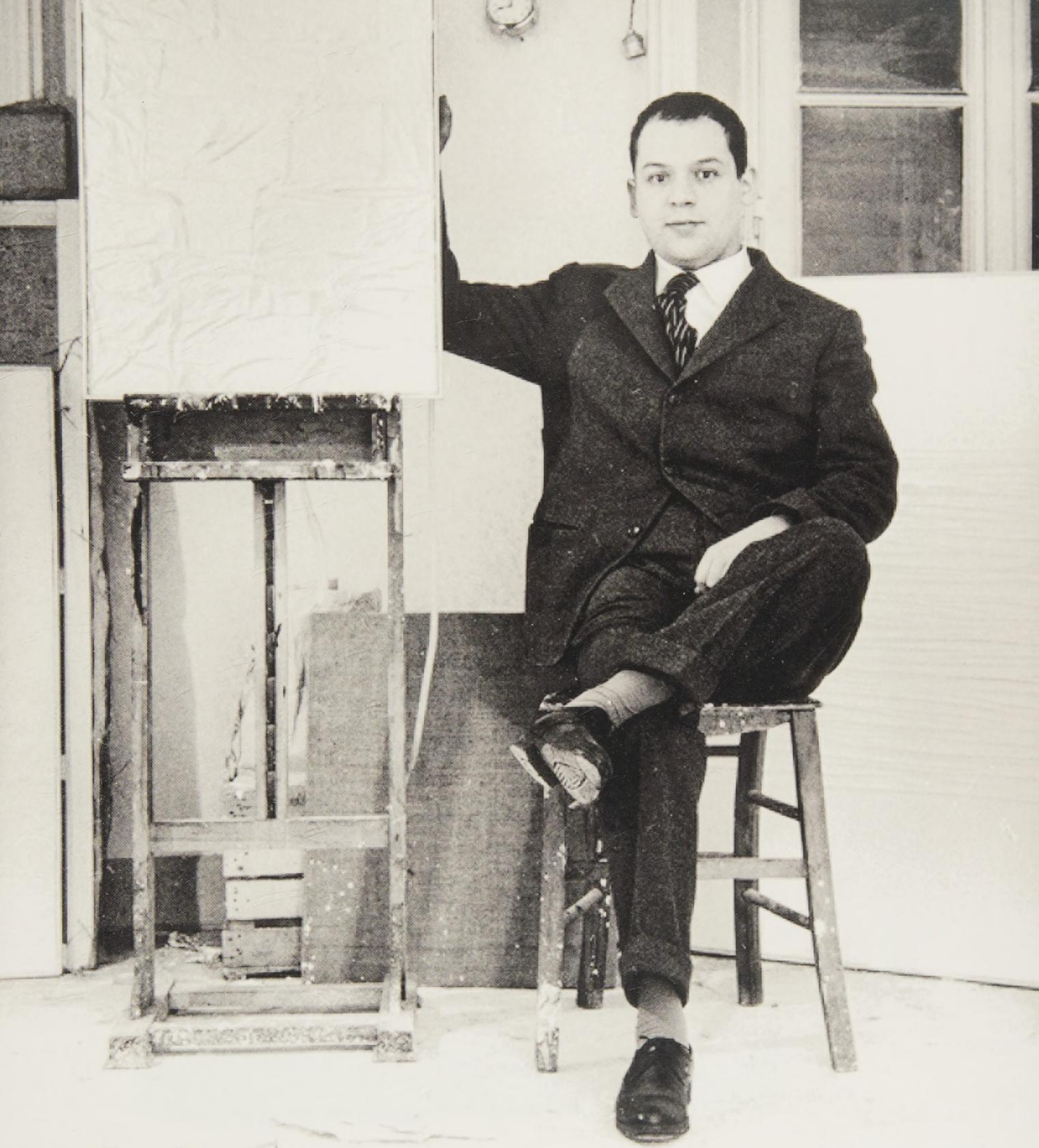


Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge

surface

PIERO MANZONI >

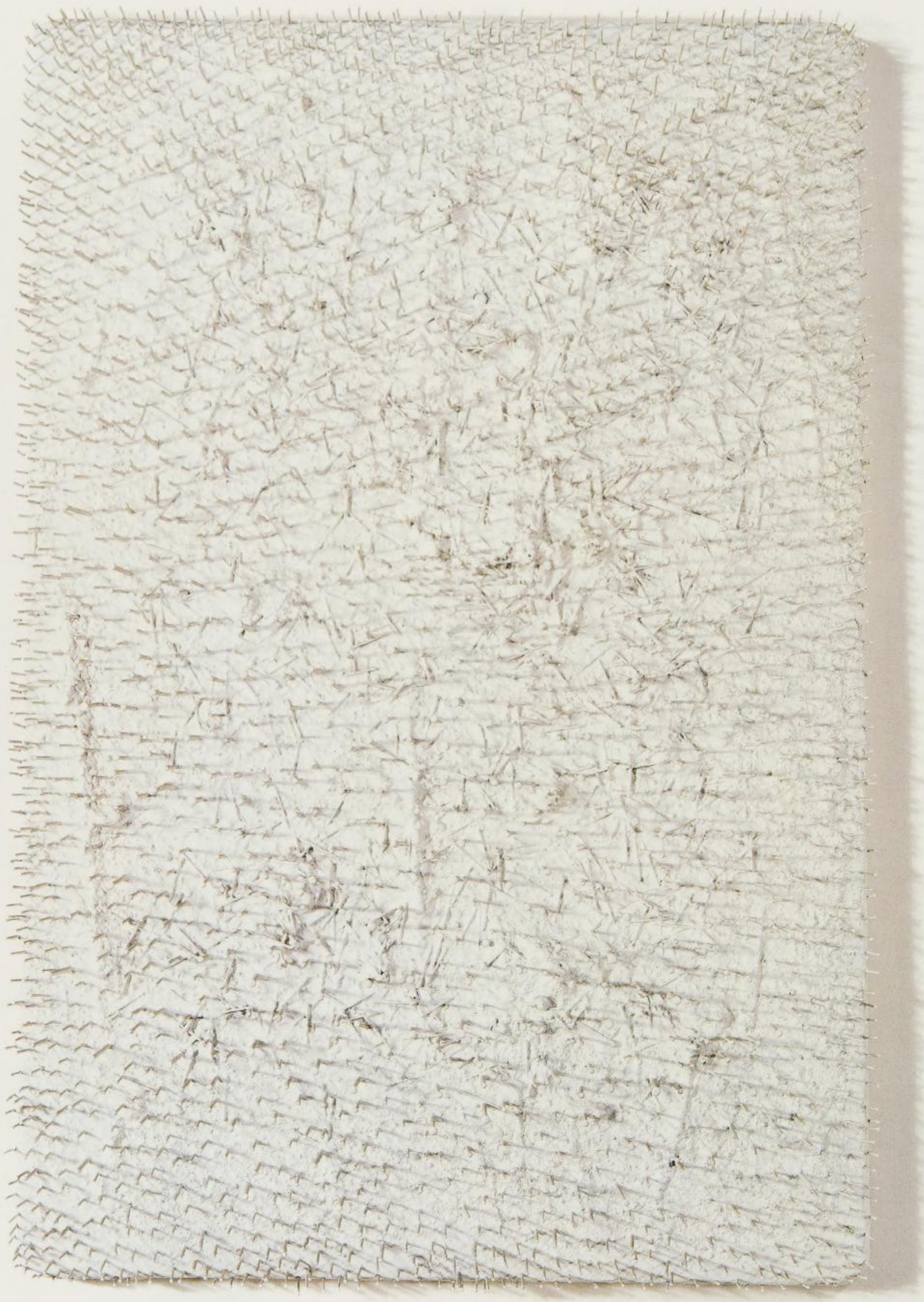
Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Vogel. Schweigend. Schw



esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön

günther uecker

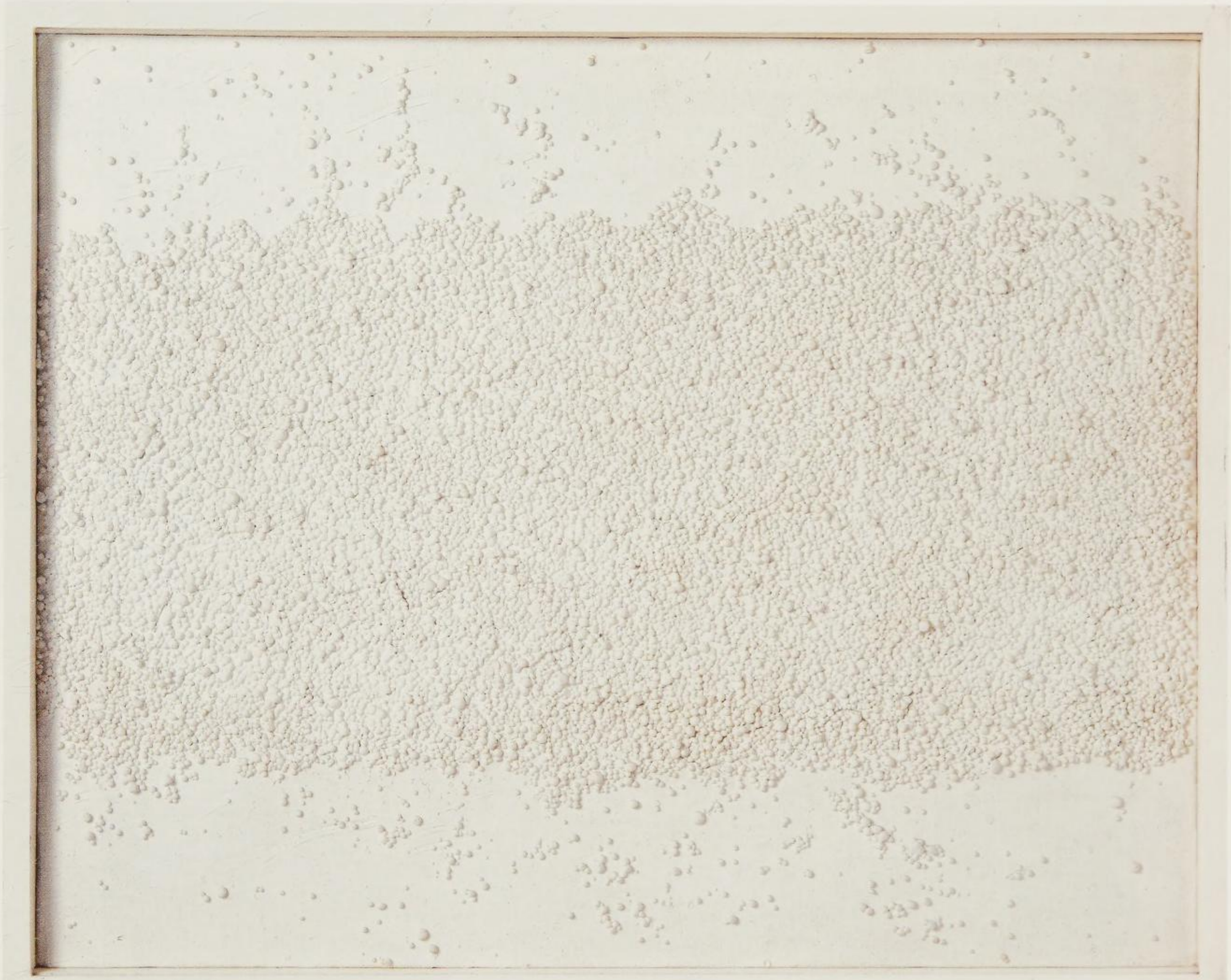
Informelle Struktur, 1957
Informal Structure, 1957
Nails and plaster on canvas mounted on wood, spray-painted
100 x 70 cm
Berlin State Museums, Nationalgalerie



dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot o

piero manzoni

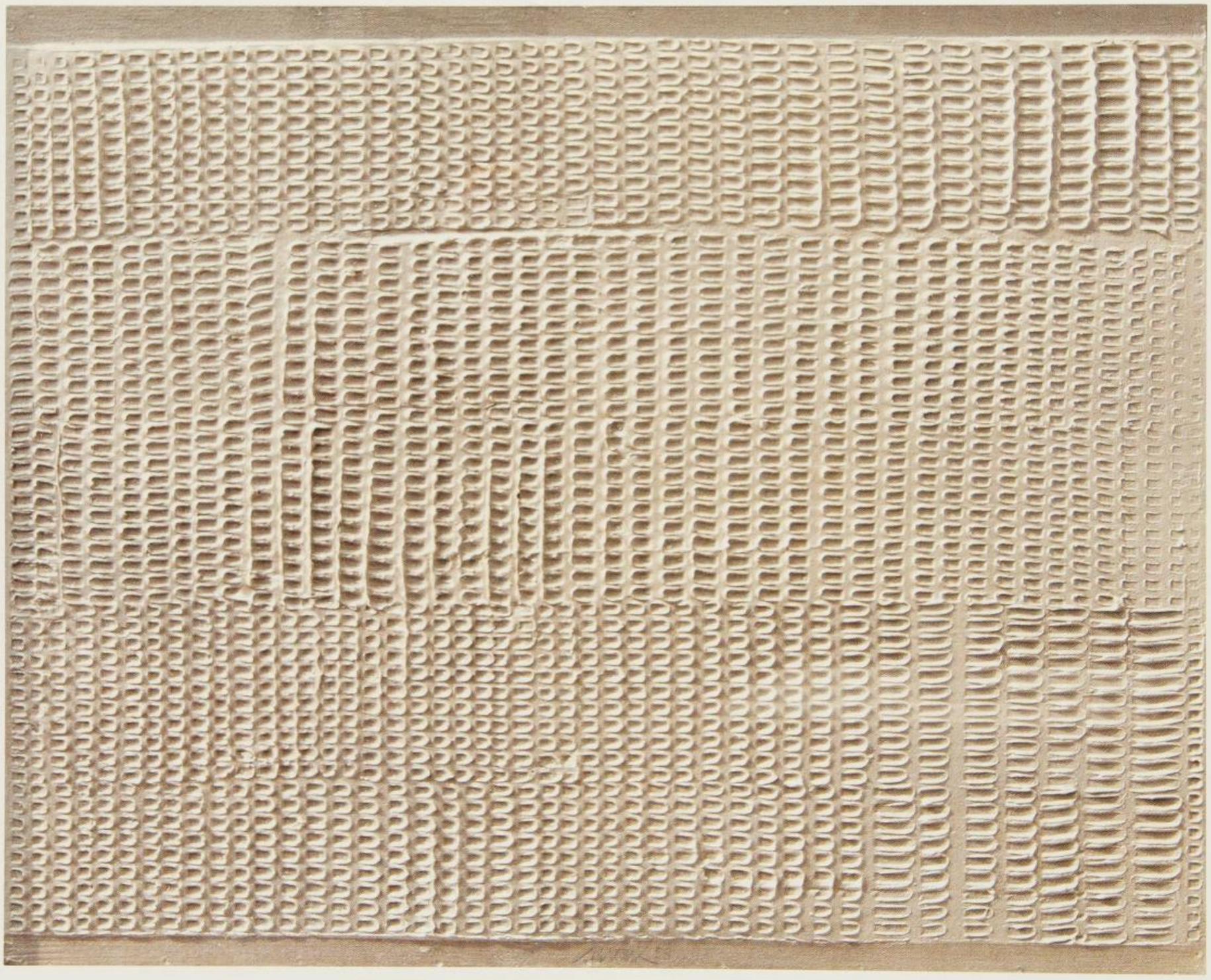
Achrome, 1962
Styrofoam and kaolin on canvas
66 x 81 cm
Helga and Edzard Reuter Collection, Stuttgart



grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, Scha

heinz mack

Weisse Wüste, 1958
White Desert, 1958
Plaster and synthetic resin on wood
90 x 110 cm
Studio Mack



piero manzoni

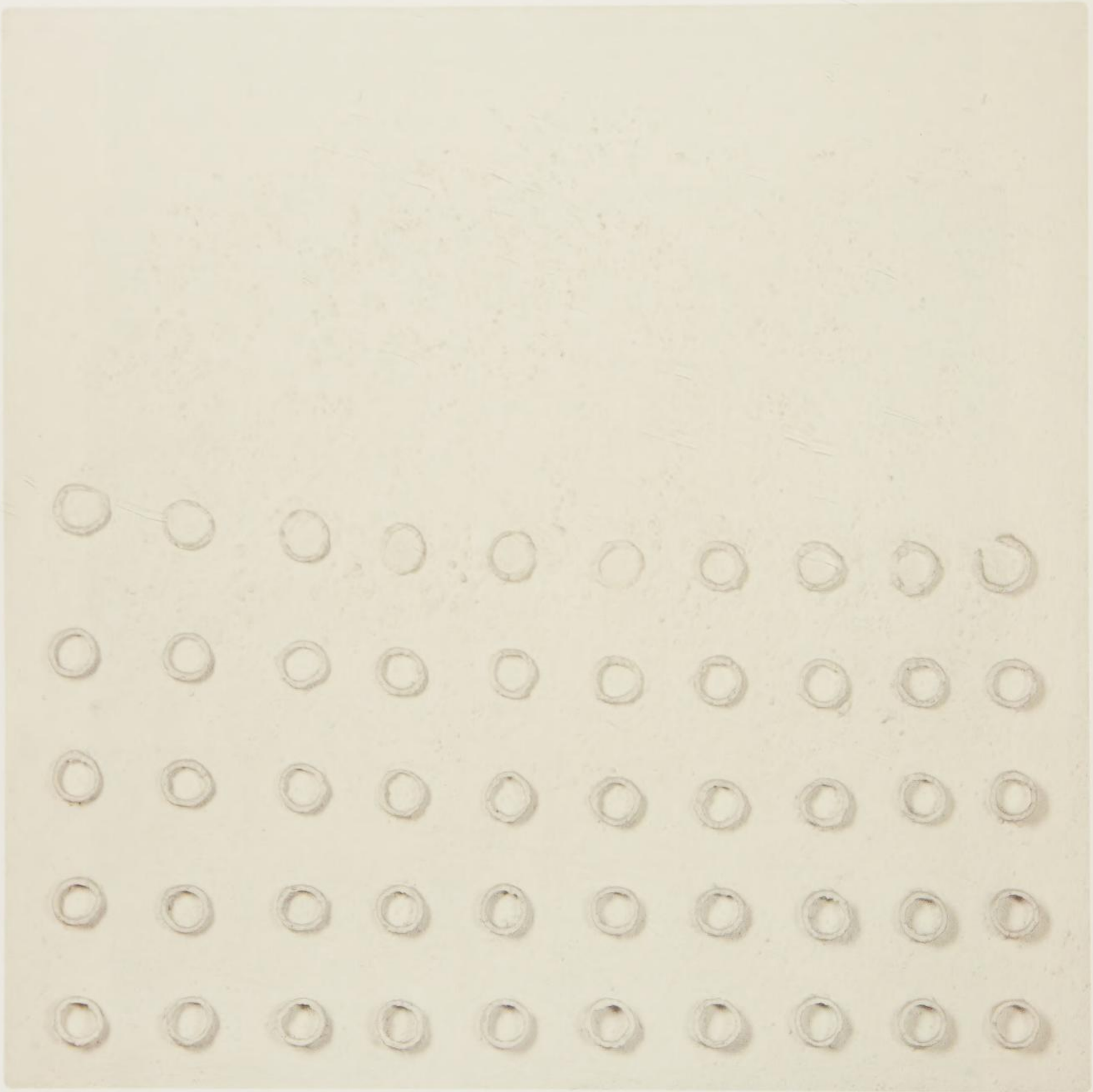
Achrome, 1959
Kaolin on canvas on jute
100 x 80 cm
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



ro ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüs

günther uecker

Formationsauflösung, 1958
Dissolution of Formation, 1958
Cardboard tubes and synthetic resin on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Rira Collection



günther uecker

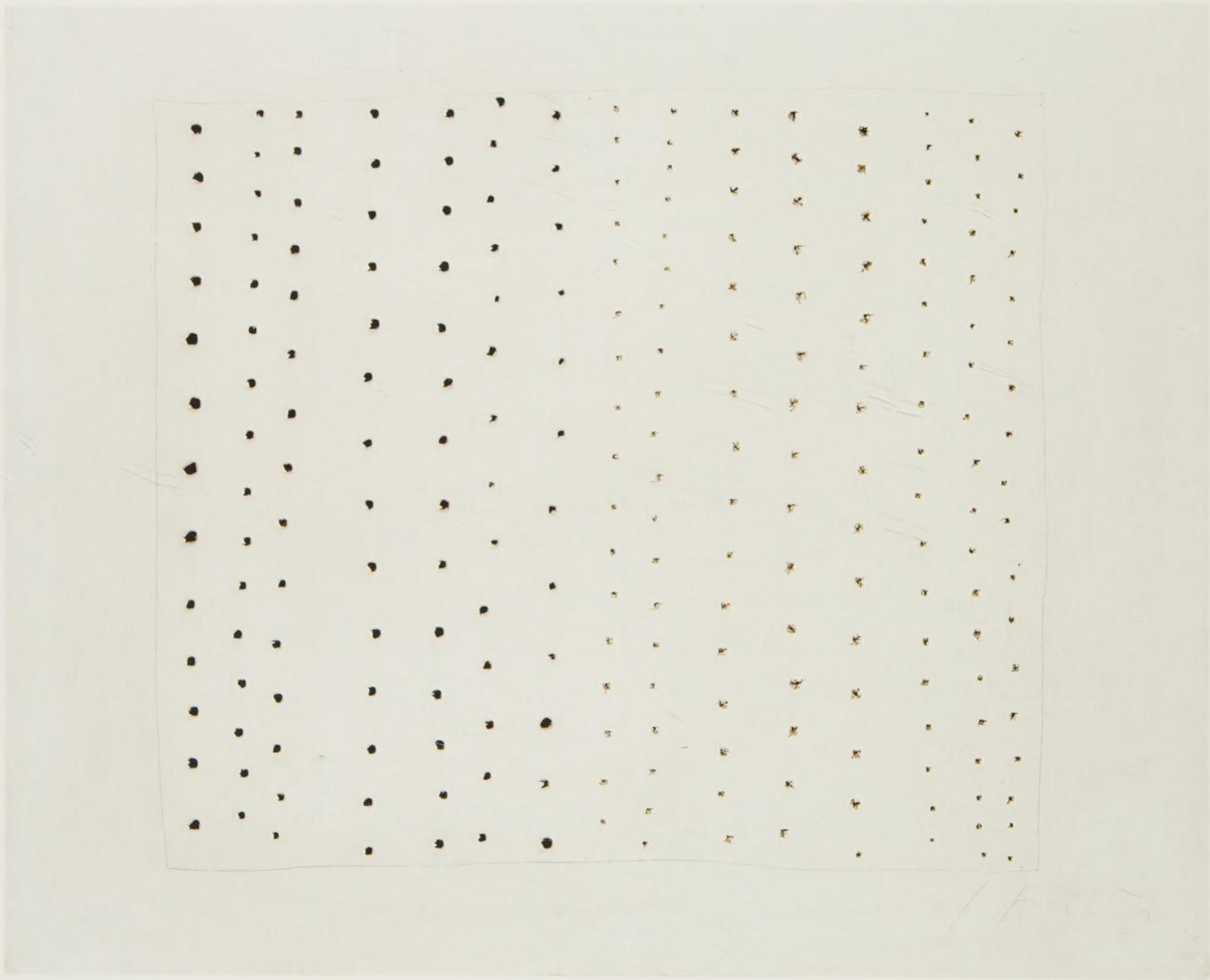
Struktur, 1958
Structure, 1958
Acrylic and papiermaché on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Schaub Collection, Landshut



h ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Vogel. Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trink

Lucio Fontana

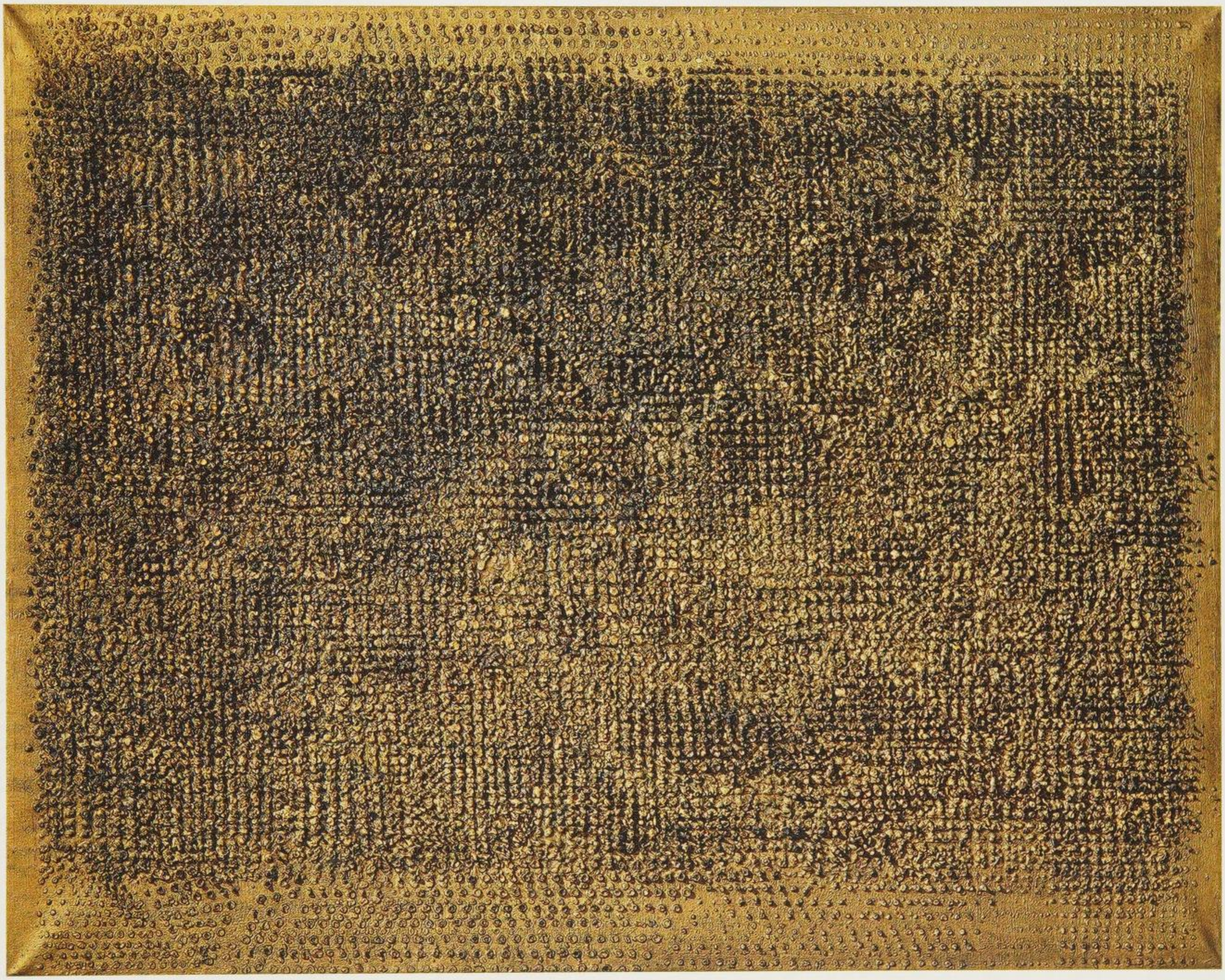
Concetto Spaziale, 1959
Spatial Concept, 1959
Oil and pencil on perforated canvas
80 x 100 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf



Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dy

otto piene

Bronze + Gold IV, 1958 – 1959
Bronze + Gold IV, 1958 – 1959
Oil on canvas
80 x 100 cm
Marianne and Viktor Langen Collection, Neuss



Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo bla

radiation

OTTO PIENE >

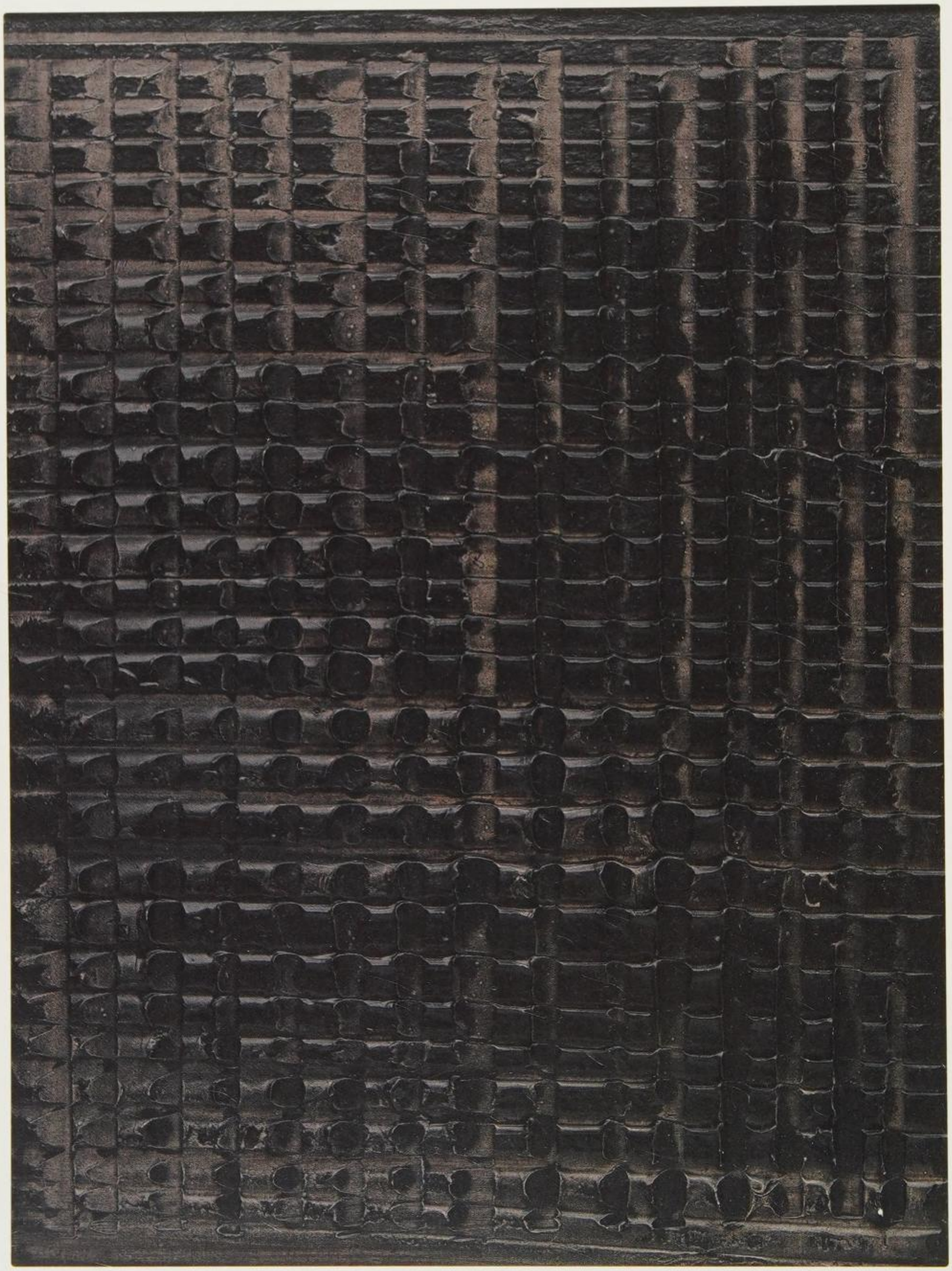
blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, Schall und Rauch Wand



ero. Zero ist rund. Zero ist Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zer

heinz mack

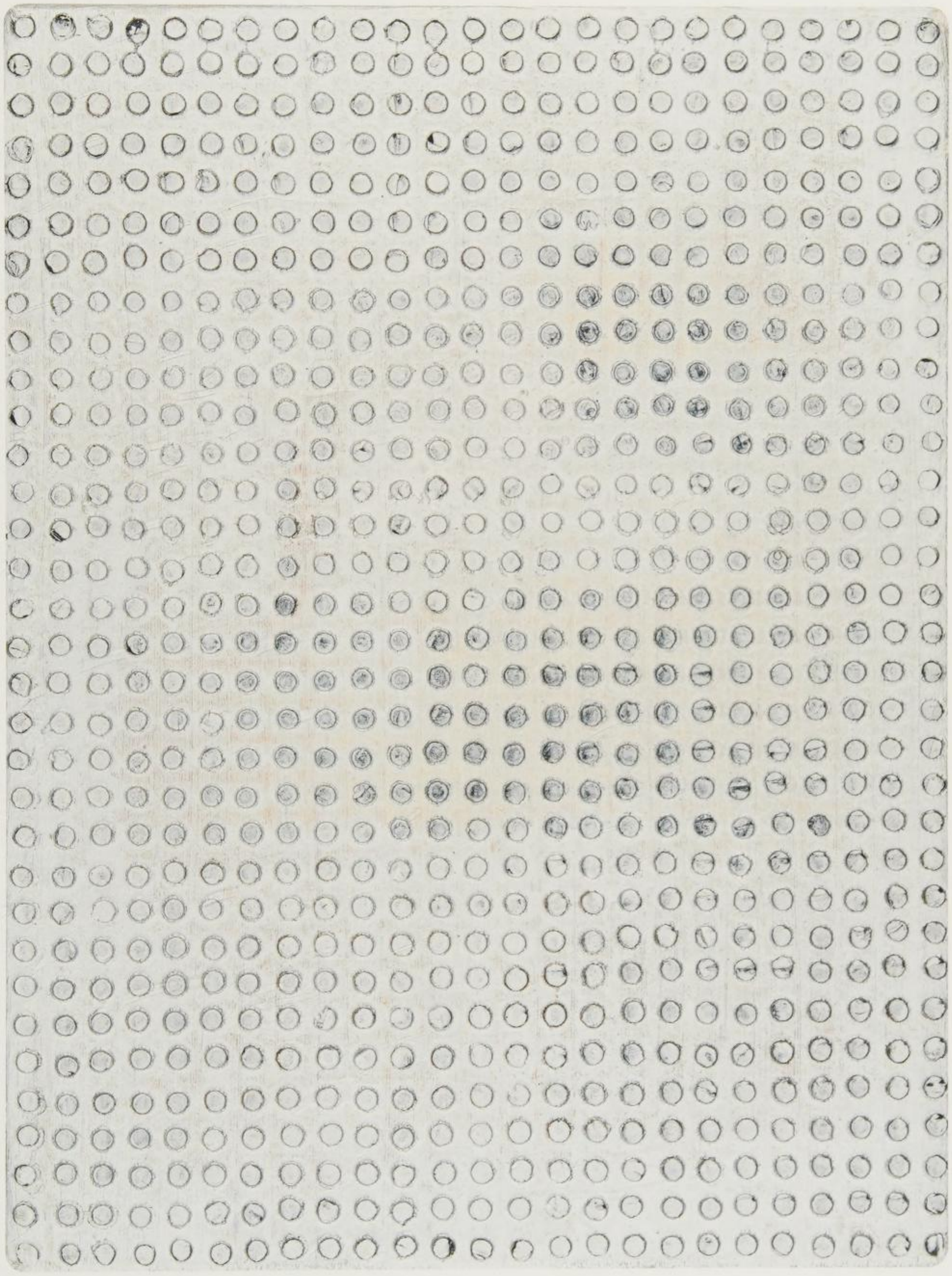
Struktur, 1957
Structure, 1957
Synthetic resin on board
53.5 x 39.5 cm
Private Collection



dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Him

otto piene

Frequenz (Silber), 1957
Frequency (Silver), 1957
Oil and aluminum color on canvas
40.5 x 30.5 cm
Kaiser Wilhelm Museum Collection, Krefeld



ero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die

yves klein

Monogold sans titre (MG 11), 1961
Untitled Monogold (MG 11), 1961
Gold leaves on panel
74.5 x 59.5 cm
Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf



Blume Zero der Vogel. Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich sch



otto piene

Corona Borealis, 1965
Aluminum, chrome-plated brass, 400 light bulbs, electric installation, timer
Ø 75 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, Düsseldorf

vibration

HEINZ MACK >

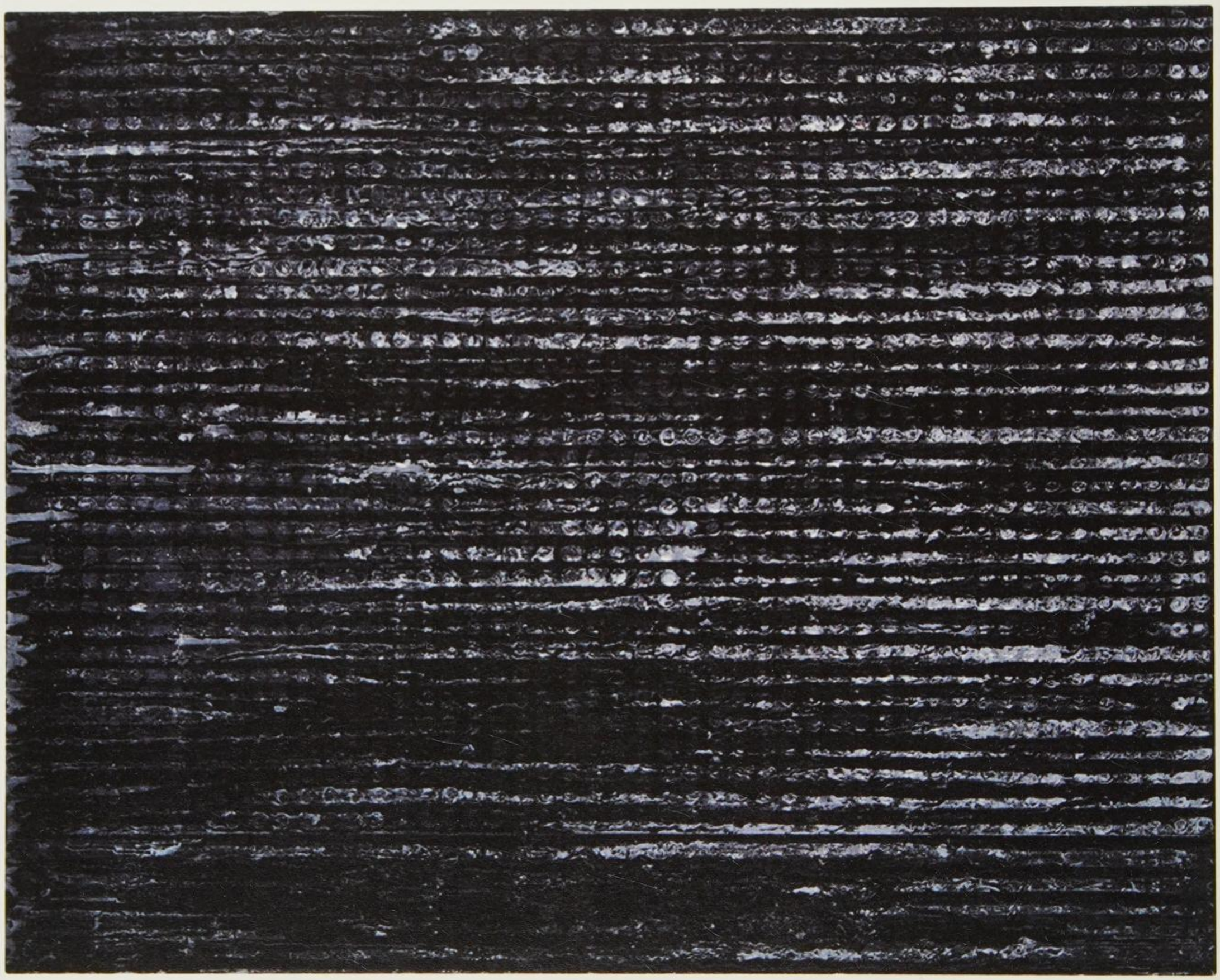
Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett



egenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, Schall und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero is

otto piene

Rasterbild Ohne Titel, 1957
Untitled Raster Painting, 1957
Oil on canvas
80 x 100 cm
Helga and Edzard Reuter Collection, Stuttgart



rund. Zero ist Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Z

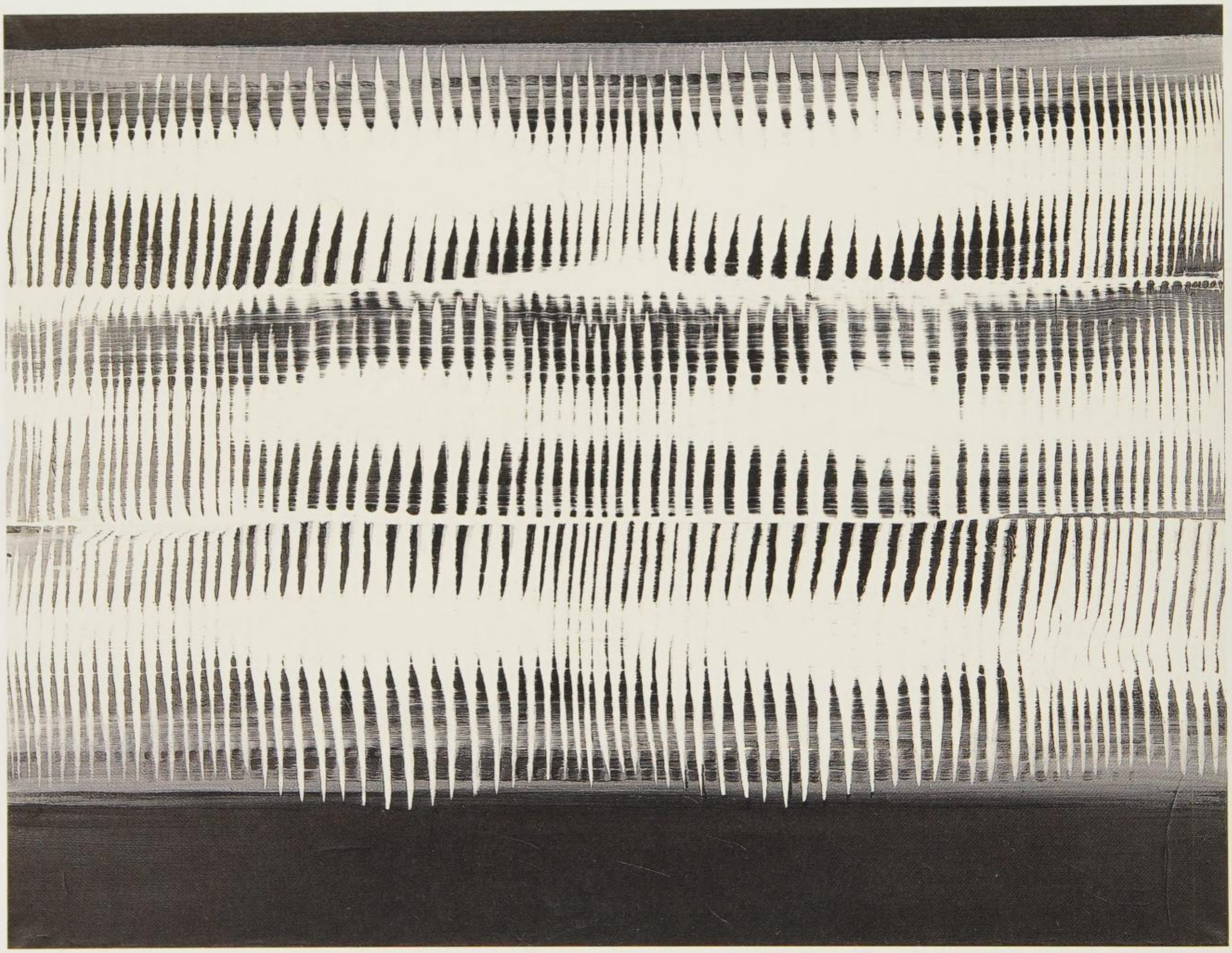
heinz mack

Drei Lichtkuben, 1959
Three Lightcubes, 1959
Neon tubes, corrugated glass, wood, aluminum
61.5 x 43 x 43 cm;
71 x 52.5 x 53 cm;
86.5 x 68 x 68 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, Düsseldorf
Donated by Heinz Mack

ond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht

heinz mack

Dynamische Struktur, 1962
Dynamic Structure (White on Black), 1962
Synthetic resin on nettle cloth
130 x 170 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf



-. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero de

heinz mack

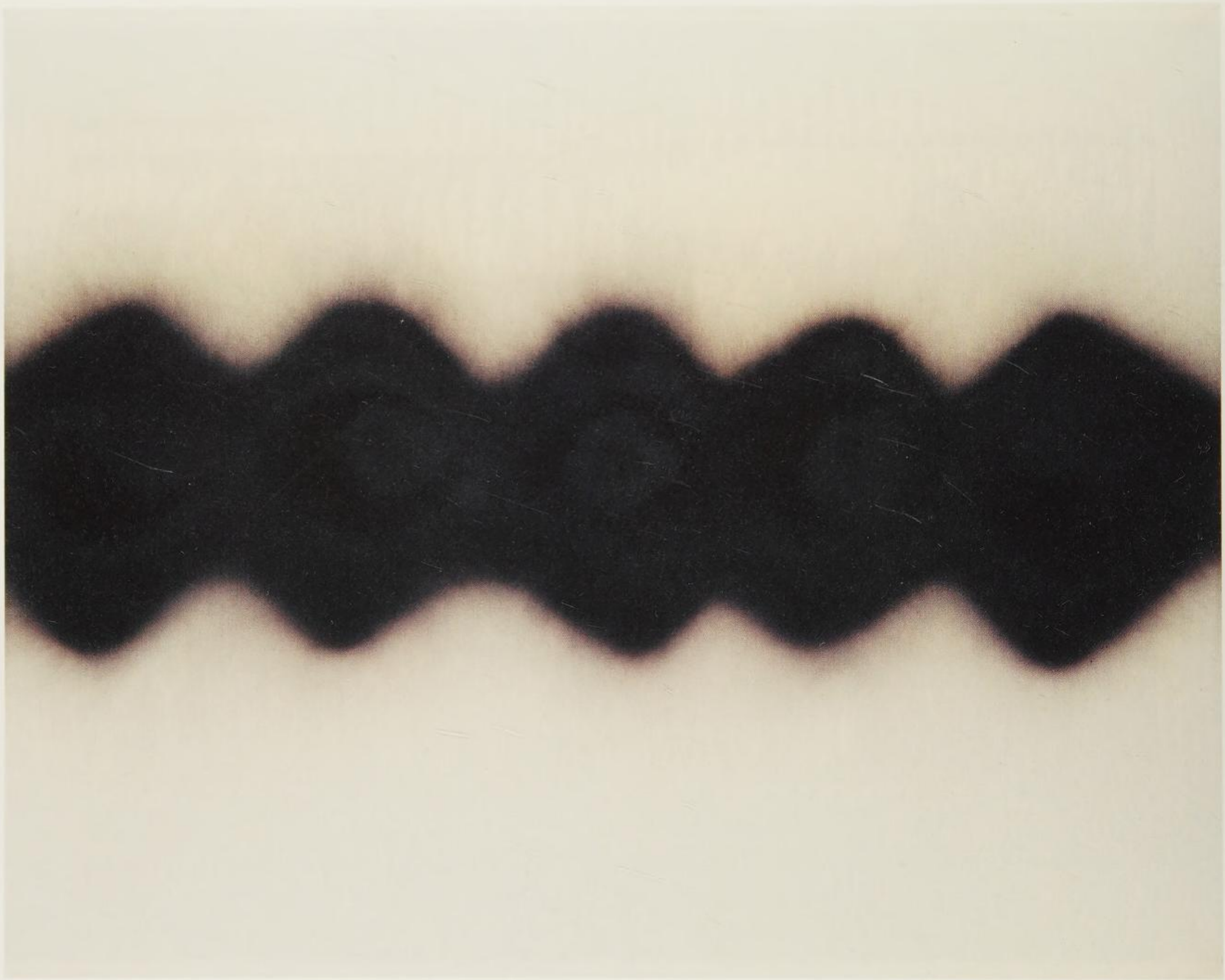
Lamellen-Relief, 1959 – 1960
Lamellae-Relief, 1959 – 1960
Aluminum on wood
103 x 121.5 x 4.5 cm
Studio Mack



weigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ic

otto piene

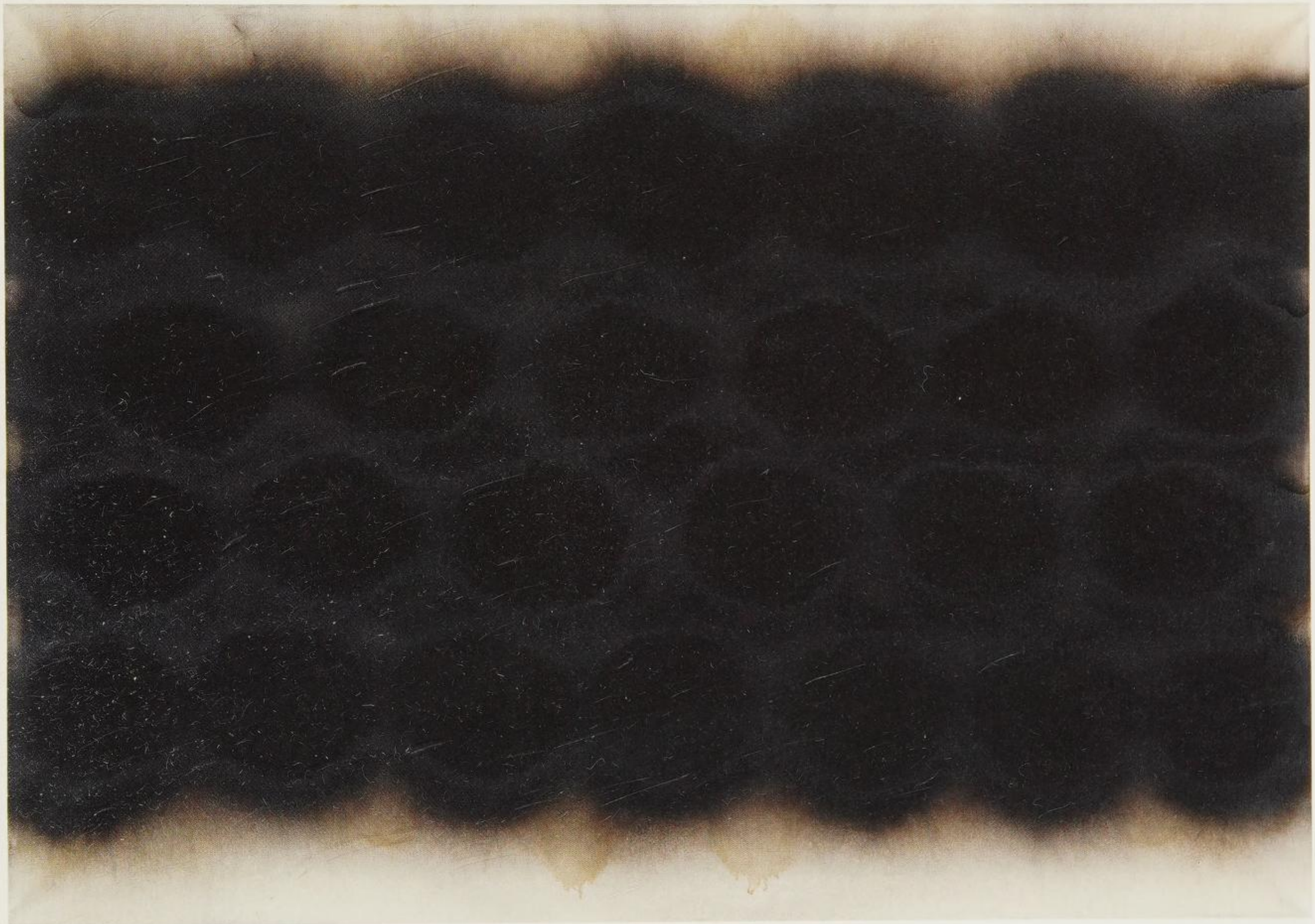
Rauchbild III, 1960
Smokepainting III, 1960
Oil and soot on canvas
80 x 100 cm
Helga and Edzard Reuter Collection, Stuttgart



iebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee

otto piene

Akkumulation, 1962 – 1963
Accumulation, 1962 – 1963
Oil and soot on canvas
120 x 170 cm
Marianne and Viktor Langen Collection, Neuss



sser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2

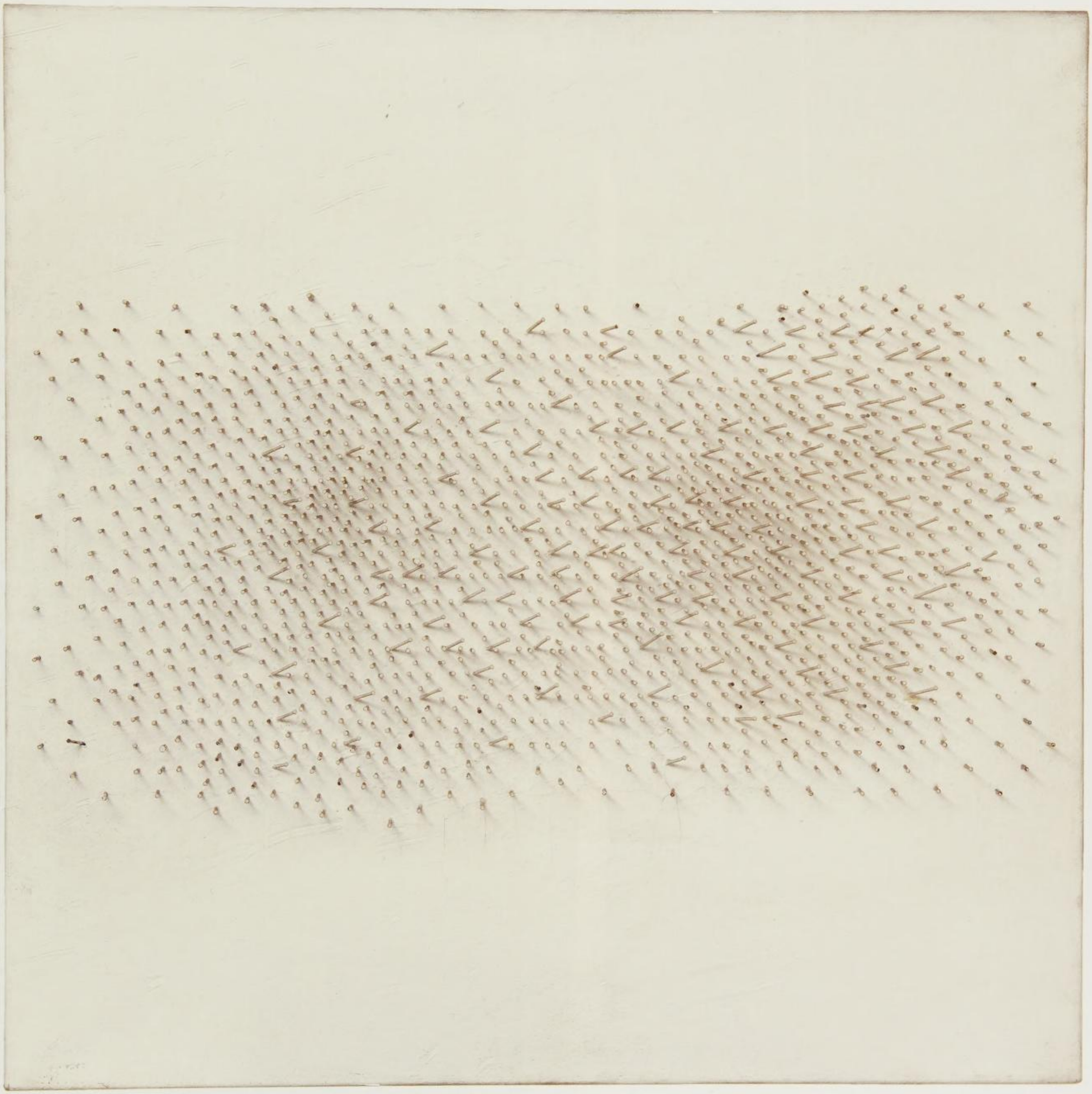
otto piene

Due Onde Nell'Oscurita, 1963
Two Waves in the Darkness, 1963
Oil and soot on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Schaub Collection, Landshut



günther uecker

Objekt Weiß, 1961
White Object, 1961
Nails on canvas on wood, sprayed
100 x 100 cm
Marianne and Viktor Langen Collection, Neuss

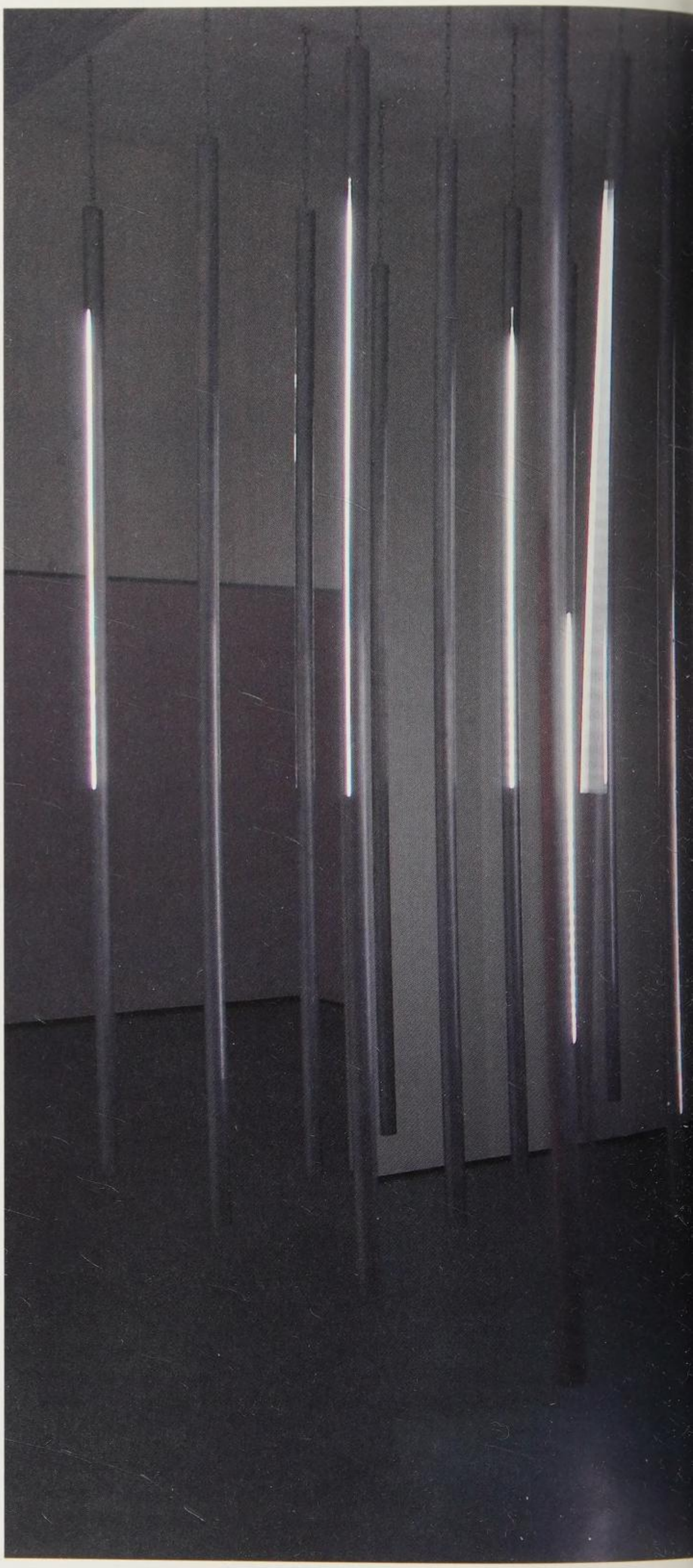


tille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne is

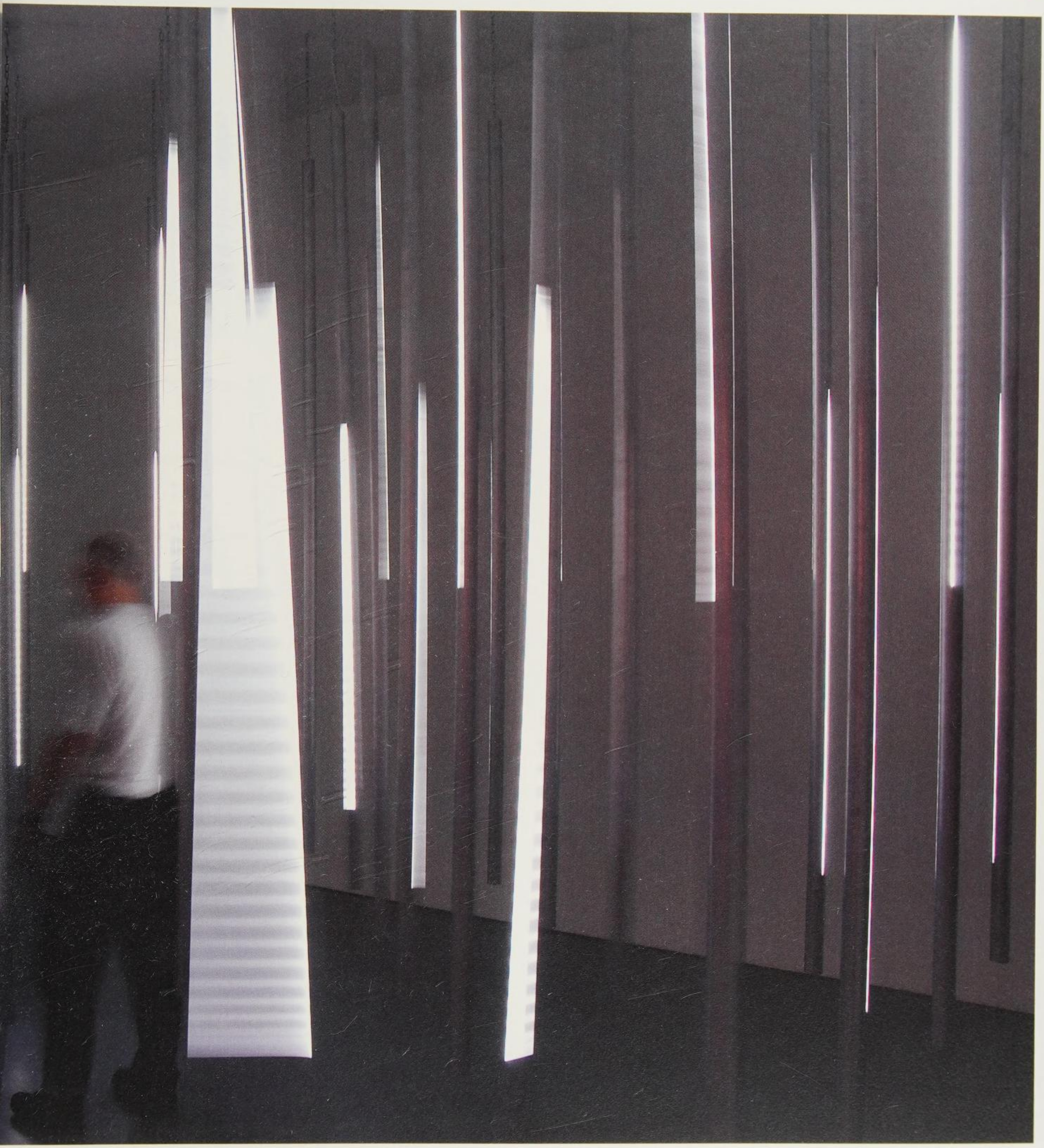
günther uecker

Lichtregen, 1966/2006
Light Rain, 1966/2006
Aluminum, neon lights
H. 250 cm, Ø 8 cm (46 pieces)
ZERO Foundation Collection, Düsseldorf
Donated by Günther Uecker

Installation: Museum Kunstpalast,
Düsseldorf, 2006



Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Au



el. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Vogel. Schweigend. Schwebend

rain/fire

OTTO PIENE >

ch esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist sch



dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange

yves klein

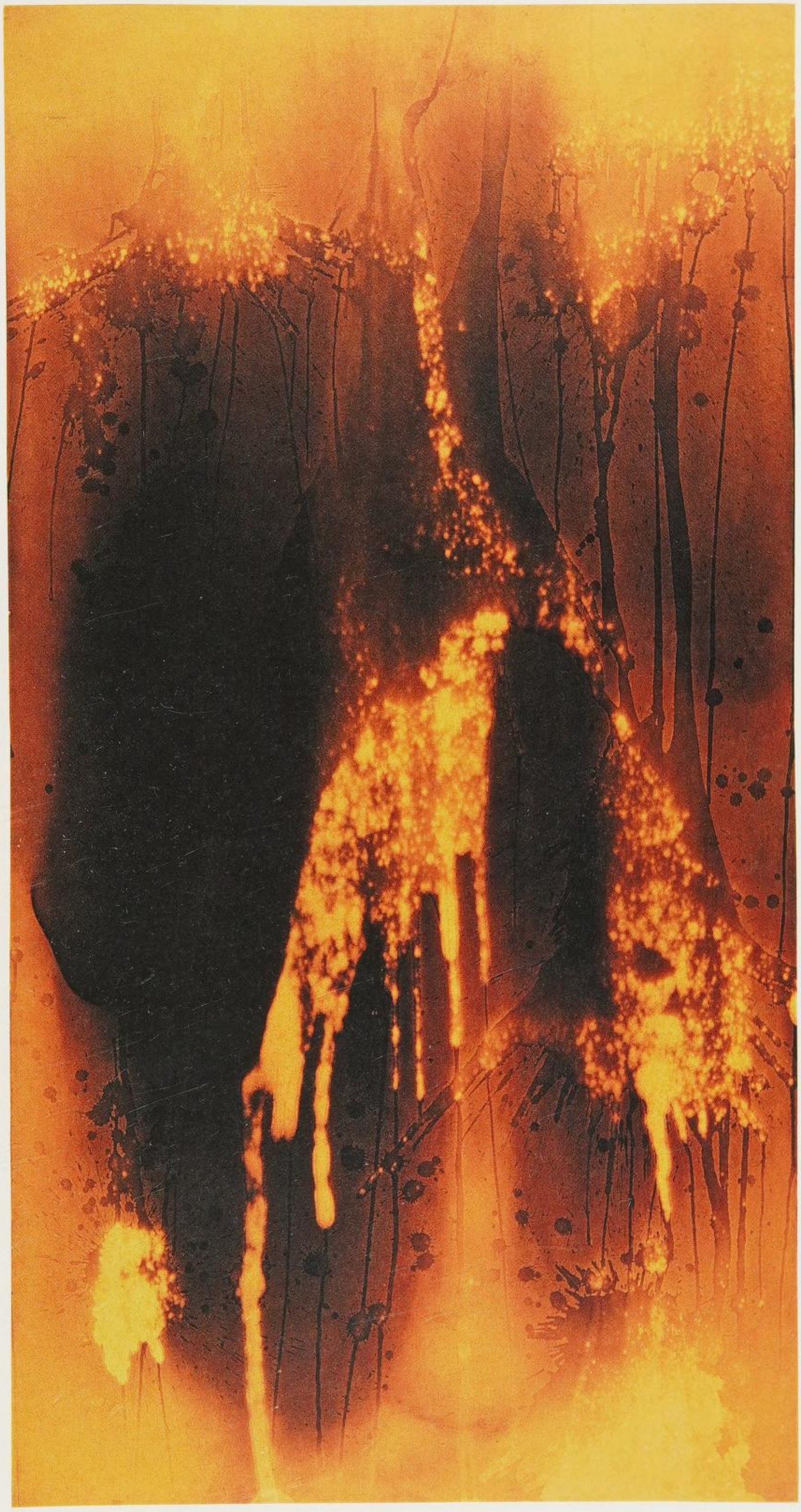
La Marque du Feu (F 85), 1961
The Mark of Fire (F 85), 1961
Burnt cardboard mounted on panel
79 x 119 cm
Private Collection



gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, S

yves klein

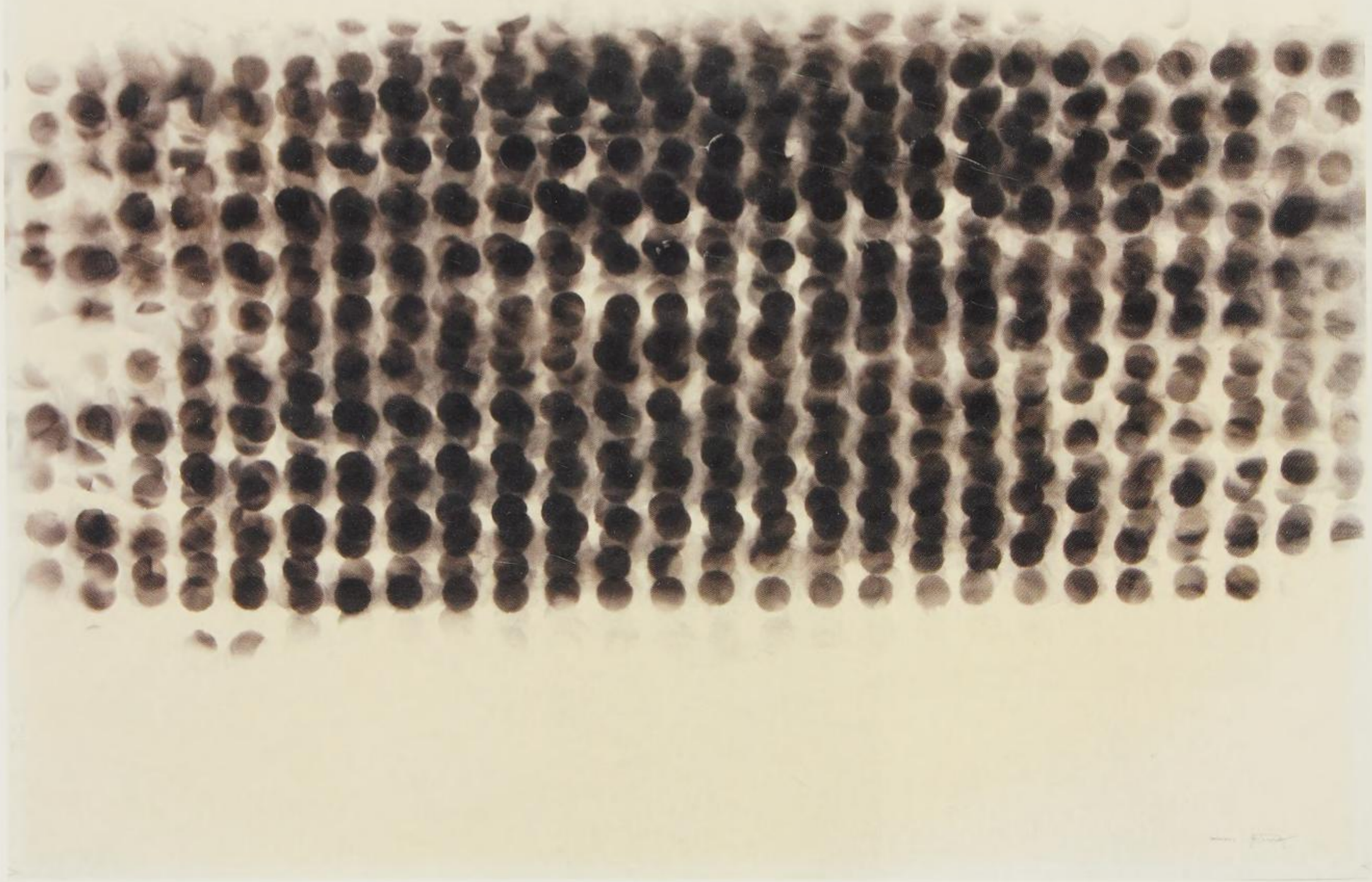
Peinture de feu sans titre (F 27 I), c. 1961
Untitled Fire Painting (F 27 I), c. 1961
Burnt cardboard mounted on panel
250 x 130 cm
Private Collection



uch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero ist rund. Zero ist Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang

otto piene

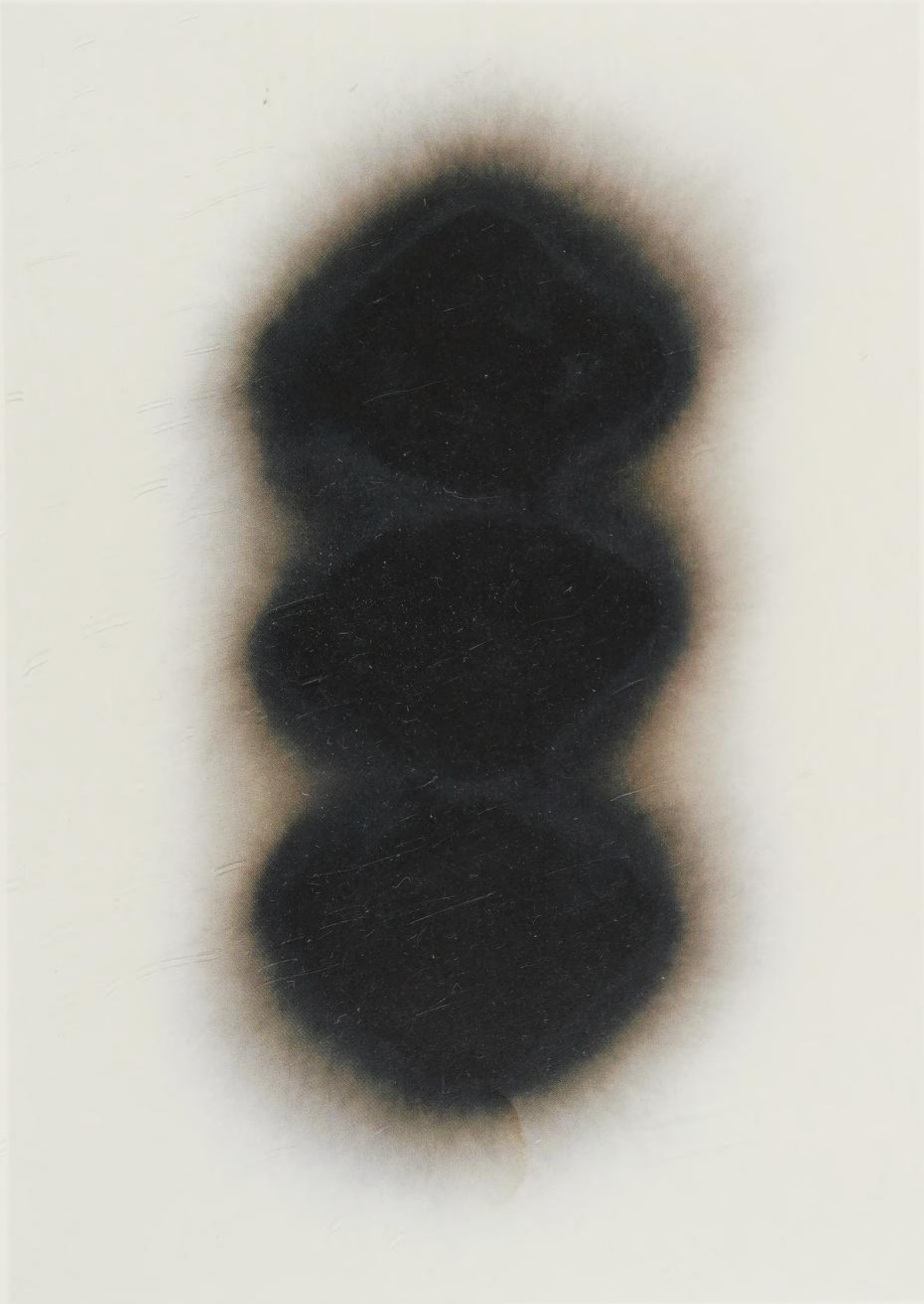
Rauchzeichnung III, 1960
Smokedrawing III, 1960
Soot on paper
50 x 60 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf



Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di W

otto piene

Ohne Titel, 1962
Untitled, 1962
Oil and soot on canvas
170 x 120 cm
Berlin State Museums, Nationalgalerie
Purchased by the State of Berlin



er Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die

yves klein

Pluie Bleue (S 36), 1961
Blue Rain (S 36), 1961
Pigment and synthetic resin on 12 wooden dowels
H. 209 cm, Ø 1.1 cm (each)
The Menil Collection, Houston

yves klein

Pigment pur bleue (S 39), 1960
Pure Blue Pigment (S 39), 1960
Pigment and wood
36 x 120 x 100 cm
Private Collection



Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Vogel. Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trin

otto piene

Große Feuerblume, 1965
Large Fireflower, 1965
Oil and soot on canvas
119.5 x 170 x 5 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf



ch schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo

light & reflection

HEINZ MACK >

Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo bl



lett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, Schall und Rauch Wanderzirku

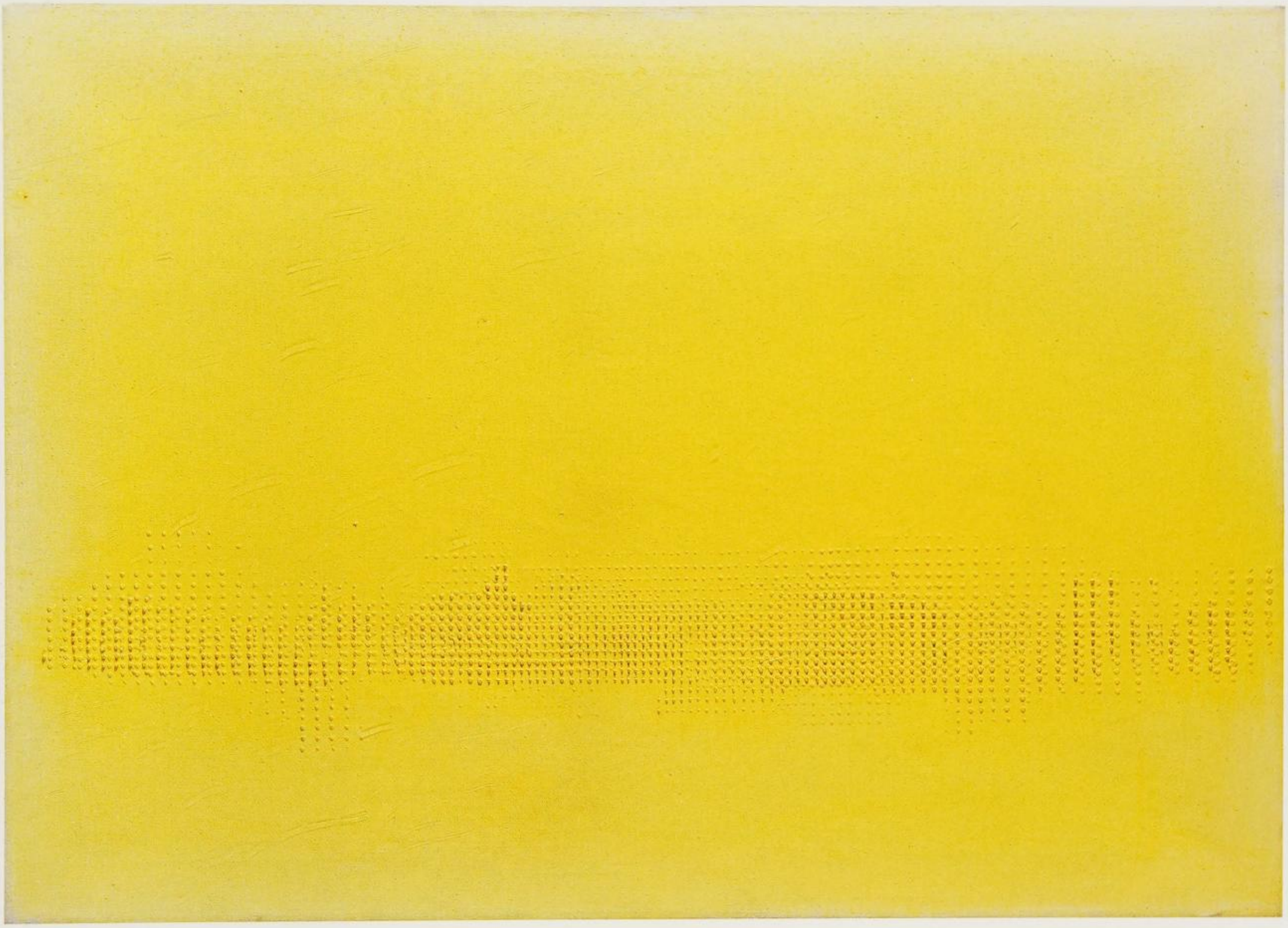
günther uecker

Symmetrische Struktur, 1959
Symmetrical Structure, 1959
Nails and plaster on canvas mounted on wood, spray-painted
130 x 80 x 13 cm
Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen



otto piene

Lichtstrom, 1959
Light Stream, 1959
Oil on canvas
68 x 96.5 cm
Ketterer Kunst, Munich



n. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel übe

otto piene

Hommage á Moholy-Nagy, 2009
Homage to Moholy-Nagy, 2009



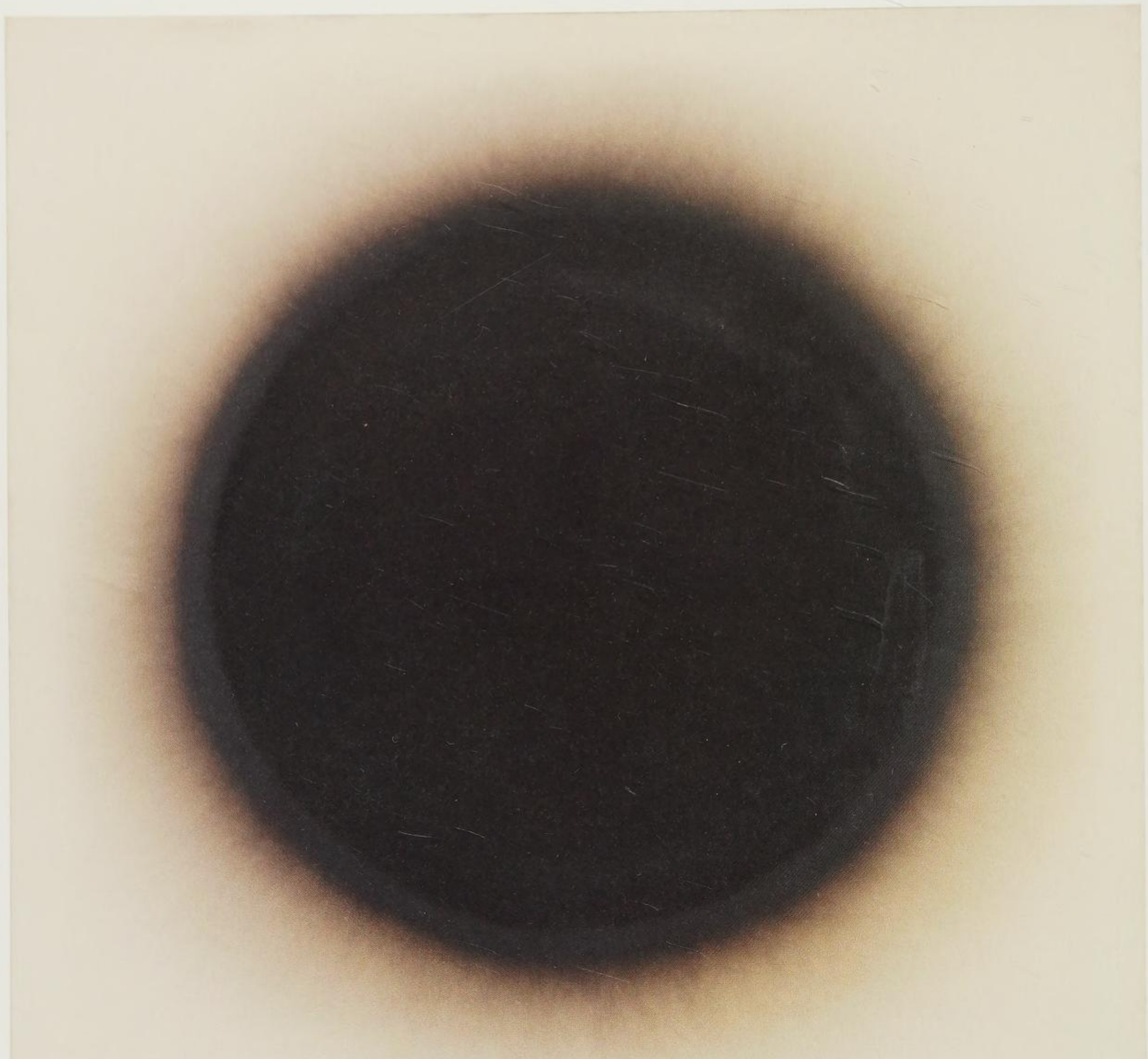
Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die



ro der Vogel. Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ic

otto piene

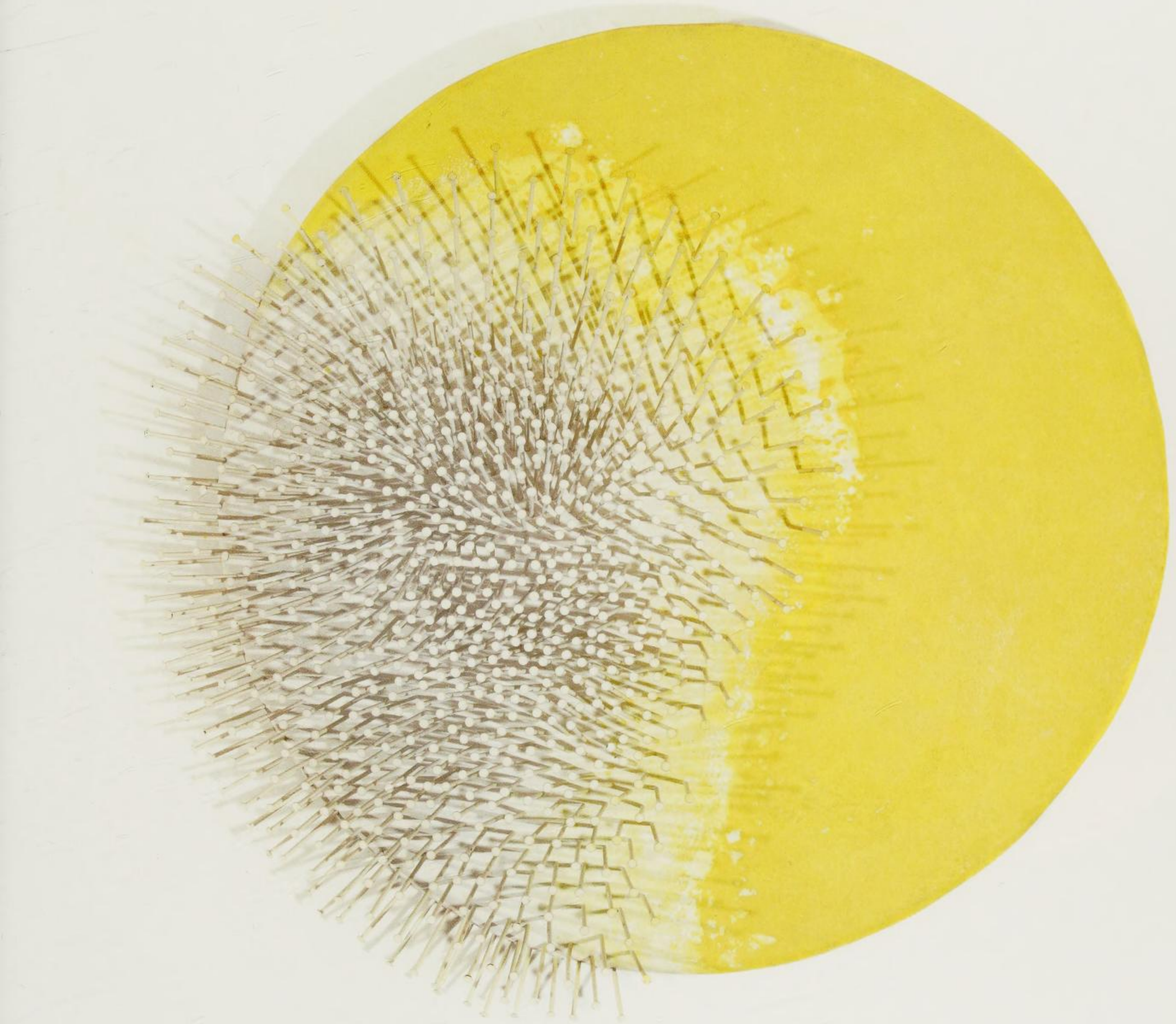
Schwarze Sonne, 1962 – 63
Black Sun, 1962 – 63
Oil and soot on canvas
151 x 151 cm
Axel and May Vervoordt Foundation, Antwerp



vache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Fr

günther uecker

Die Sonne, 1963
The Sun, 1963
Oil and nails on canvas on wood
6 cm, Ø 74 cm
Private Collection



Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero

günther uecker

Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (no. 1), 1965
Cosmic Vision / Lightdisc (no. 1), 1965
Nails on canvas mounted on wood
electric motor, floodlight
174 x 174 x 30 cm
Private Collection

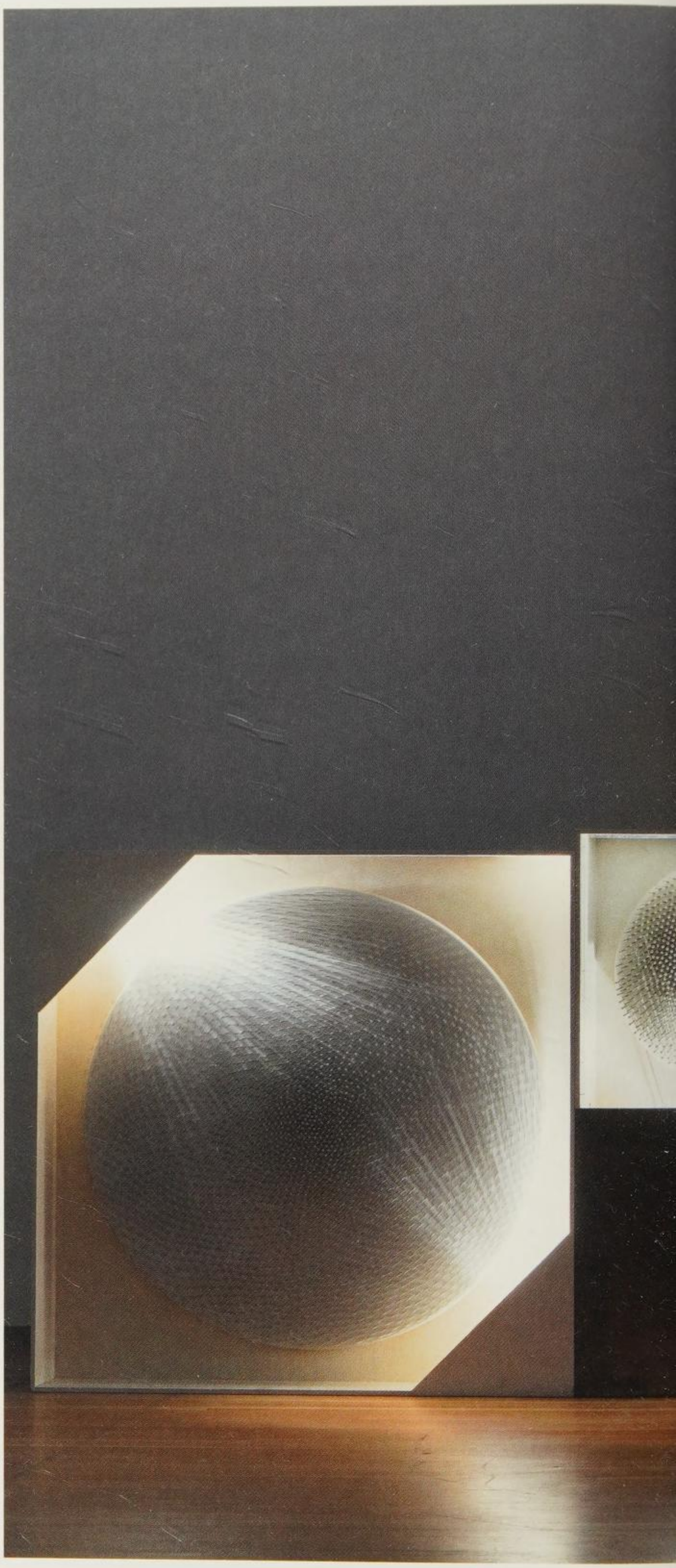
Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (no. 2), 1968
Cosmic Vision / Lightdisc (no. 2), 1968
Nails on canvas mounted on wood
electric motor, floodlight
180 x 90 x 30 cm
Private Collection

Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (no. 3), 1975
Cosmic Vision / Lightdisc (no. 3), 1975
Nails on canvas mounted on wood
electric motor, floodlight
240 x 160 x 25 cm
Private Collection

Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (no. 4), 1981
Cosmic Vision / Lightdisc (no. 4), 1981
Nails on canvas mounted on wood
electric motor, floodlight
240 x 120 x 18 cm
Private Collection

Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (no. 5), 1961
Cosmic Vision / *Lightdisc* (no. 5), 1961
Nails on canvas mounted on wood
electric motor, floodlight
225 x 175 x 38 cm
Private Collection

Installation: Martin-Gropius-Bau,
Berlin, 2015



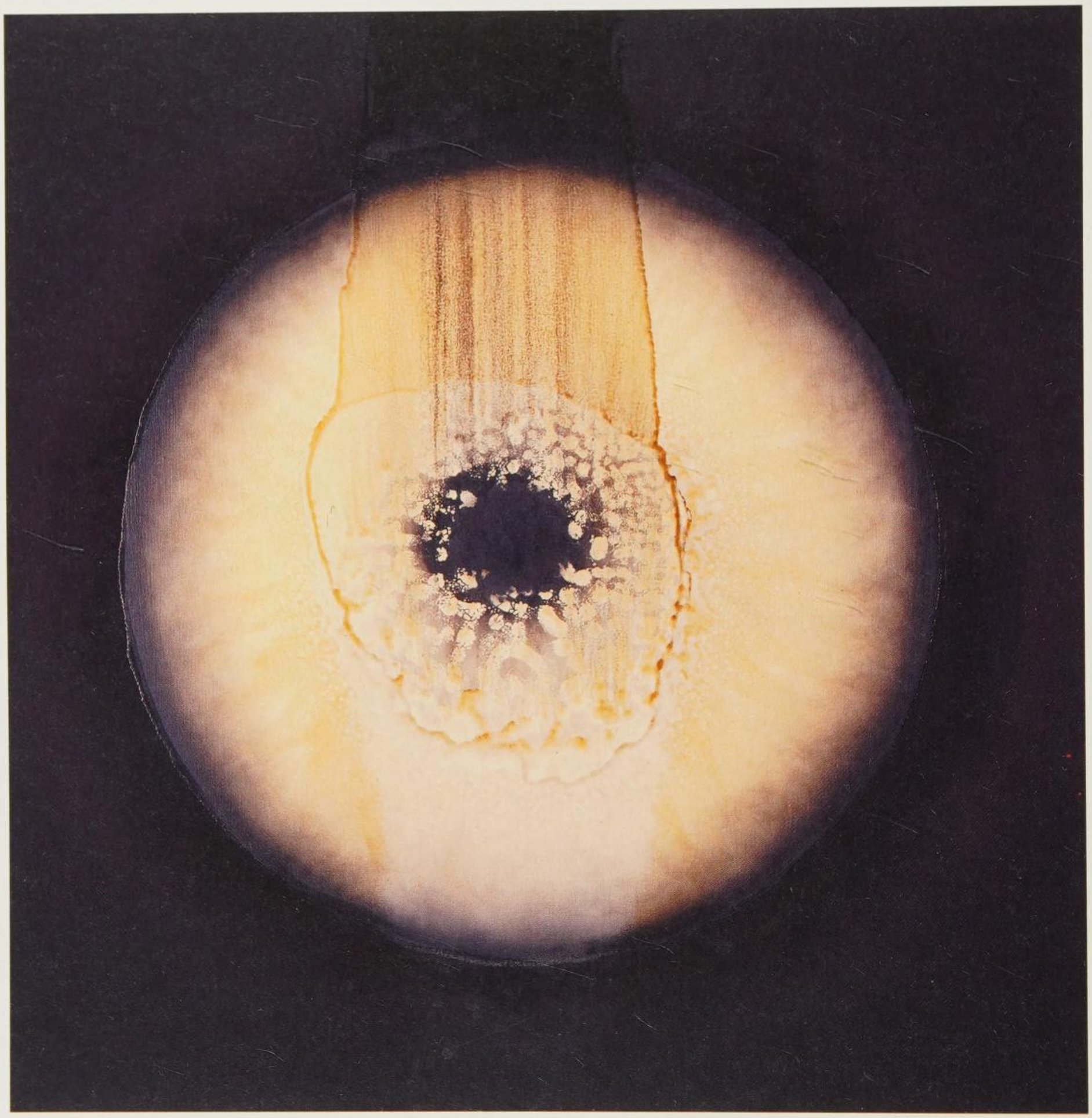
Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, Schall und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero ist



st Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der

otto piene

Feuerblume, 1965
Fireflower, 1965
Oil, pigment and soot on canvas
99.5 x 99.5 cm
Kunstmuseum, Bonn



Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Na

otto piene

Lichtgeist, 1966 (replica 2012)
Light Ghost, 1966 (replica 2012)
Metal base, crystal glass,
electric installation
H. 200, Ø 60 cm
Private Collection

Installation: Martin-Gropius-Bau,
Berlin, 2015

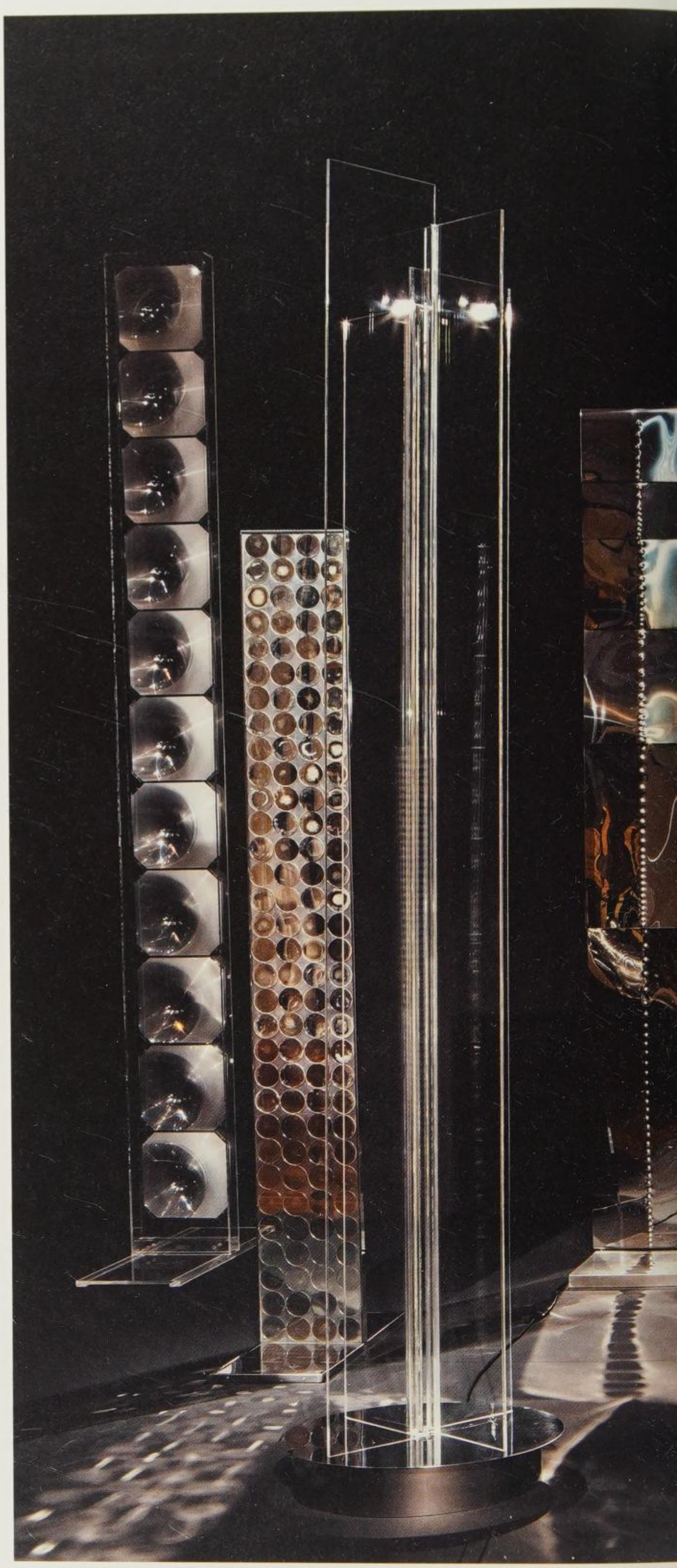


iesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Vogel

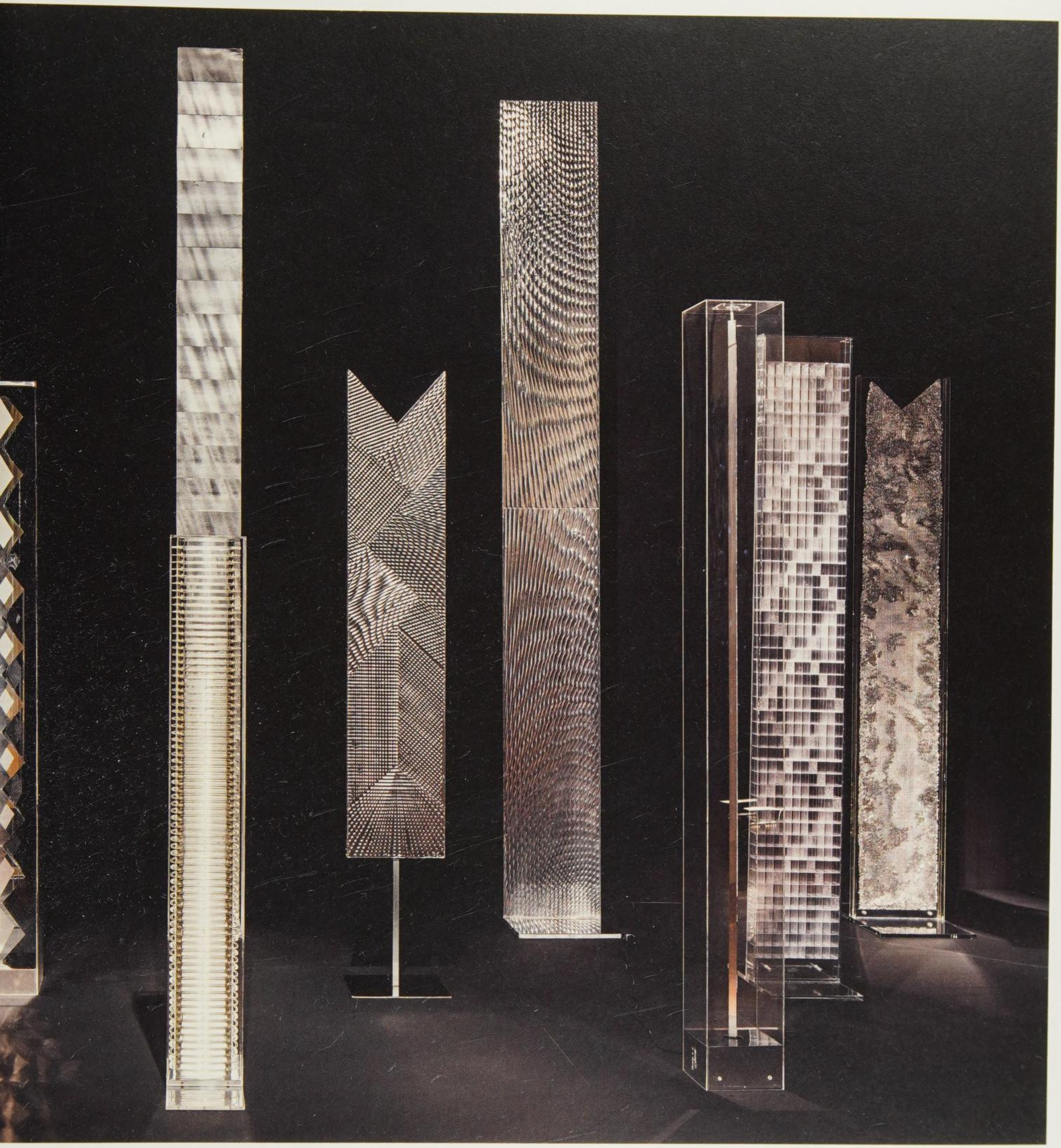
heinz mack

Licht Steles, 1964 – 2014
Light Steles, 1964 – 2014
Plexiglass, aluminum

Installation: Martin-Gropius-Bau,
Berlin 2015



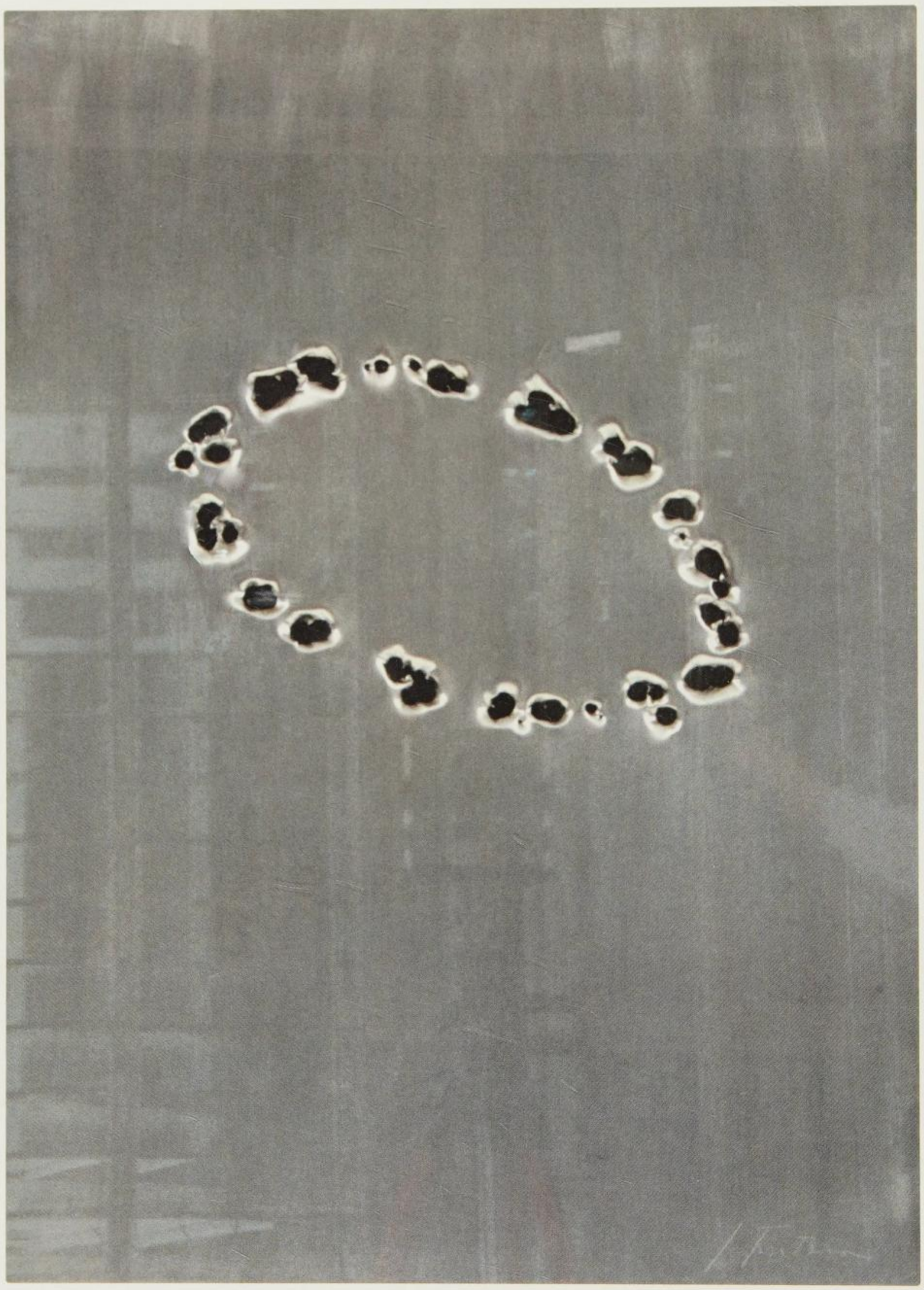
Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero



o. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer,

lucio fontana

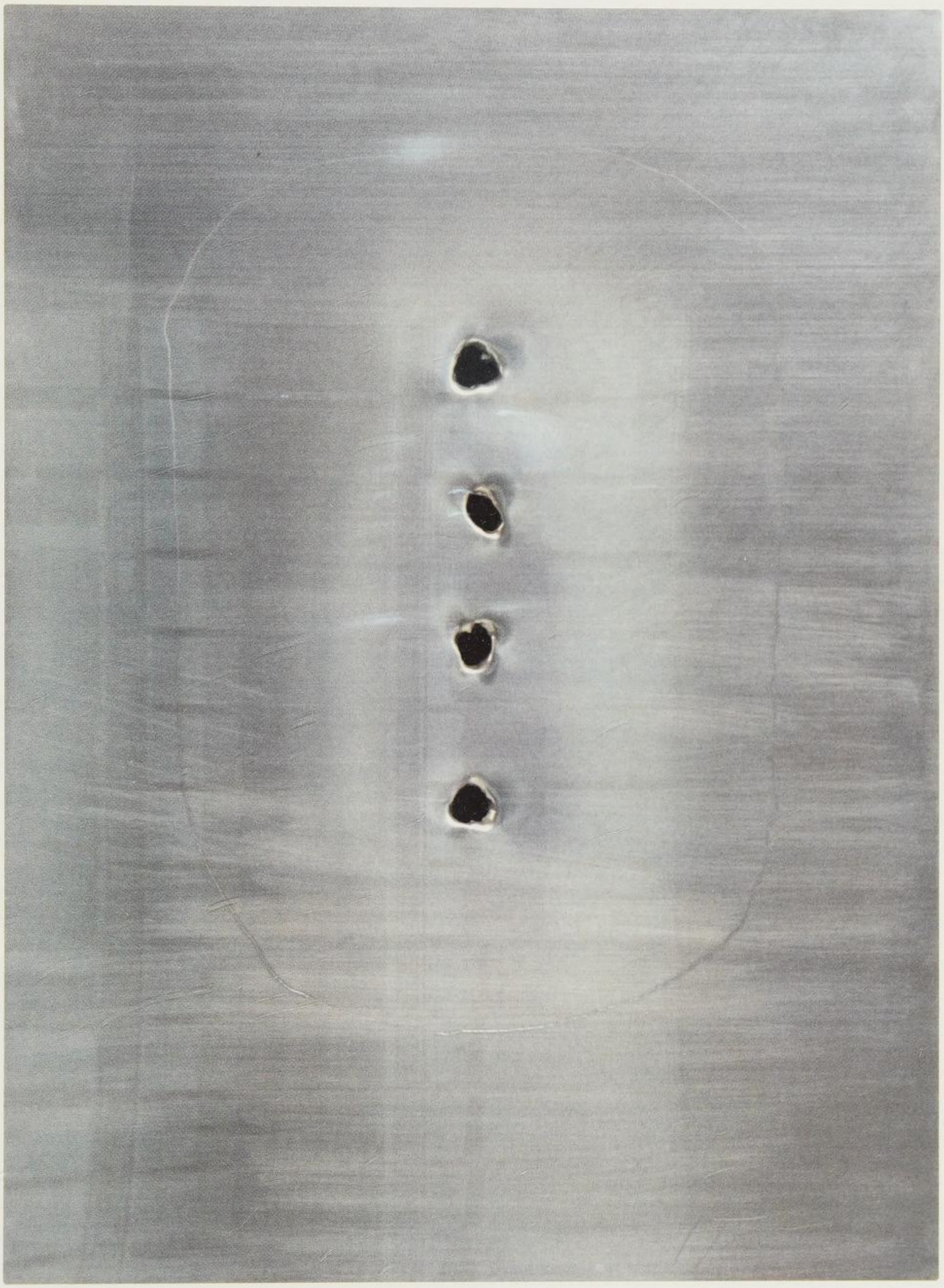
Concetto Spaziale, 1965
Spatial Concept, 1965
Perforated aluminum
86 x 63 cm
Adolf-Luther-Stiftung Collection, Krefeld



Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3

lucio fontana

Concetto Spaziale, 1965
Spatial Concept, 1965
Perforated aluminum
86 x 63 cm
Adolf-Luther-Stiftung Collection, Krefeld



old und Silber, Schall und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero ist rund. Zero ist Zero. Zero is

light & darkness

GÜNTHER UECKER >

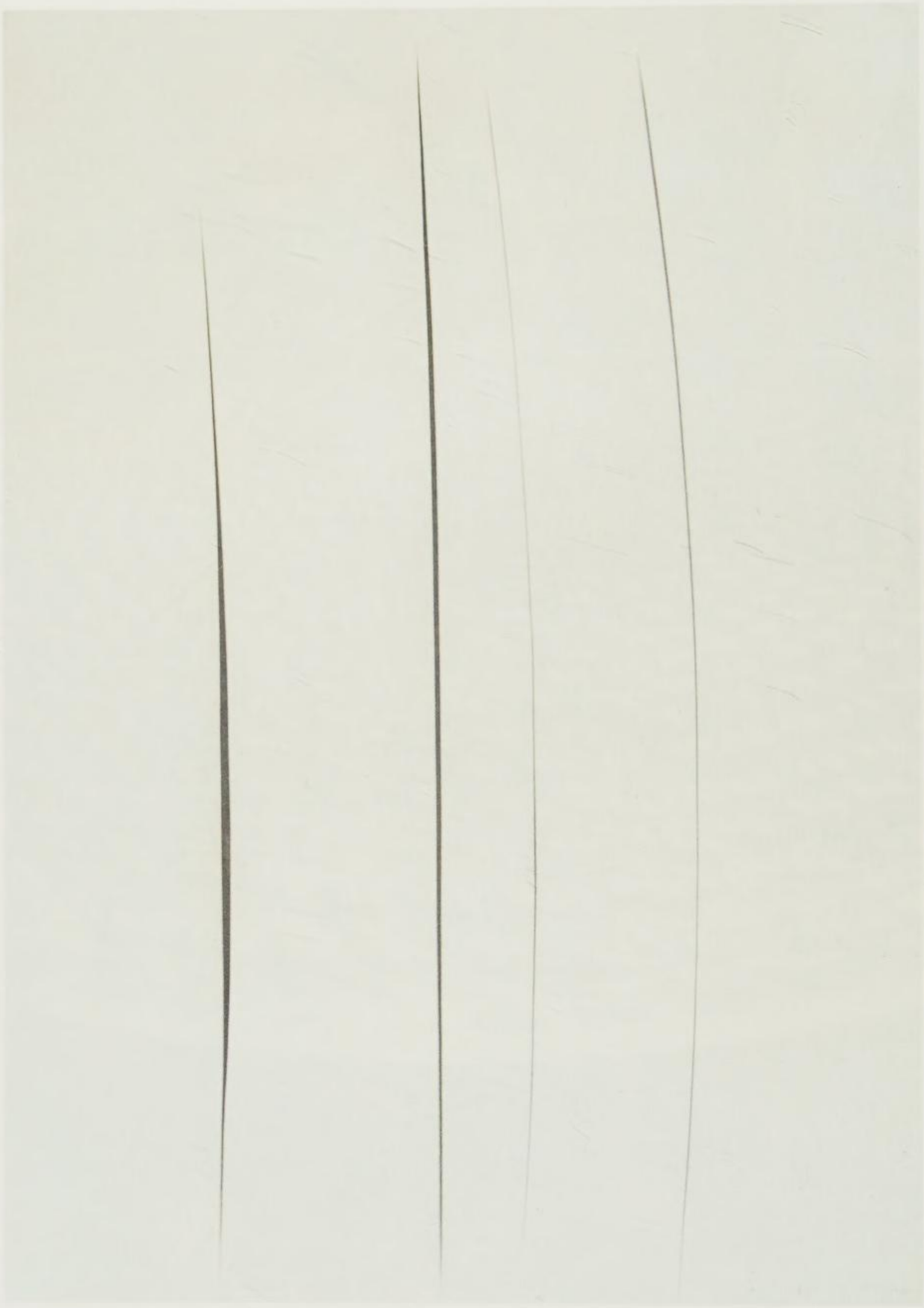
die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonn



Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Auge

lucio fontana

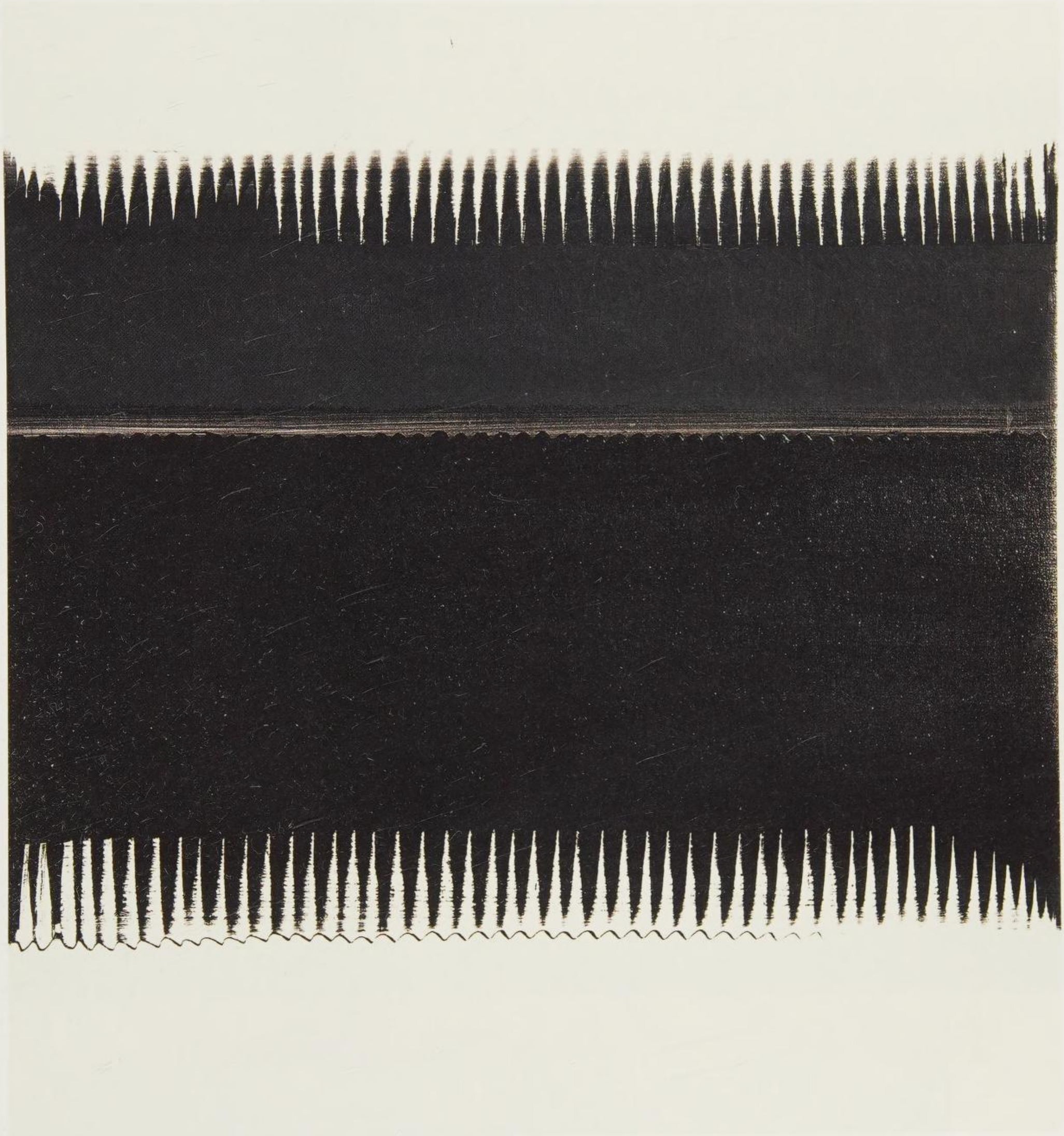
Concetto Spaziale, 1969
Spatial Concept, 1969
Watercolor on canvas, incisions
144 x 101 cm
Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen



Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der Vogel. Schweigend. Schw

heinz mack

Dynamische Struktur (Schwarz auf weiß), 1962
Dynamic Structure (Black on White), 1962
Synthetic resin on nettle cloth
130 x 120 cm
Studio Mack



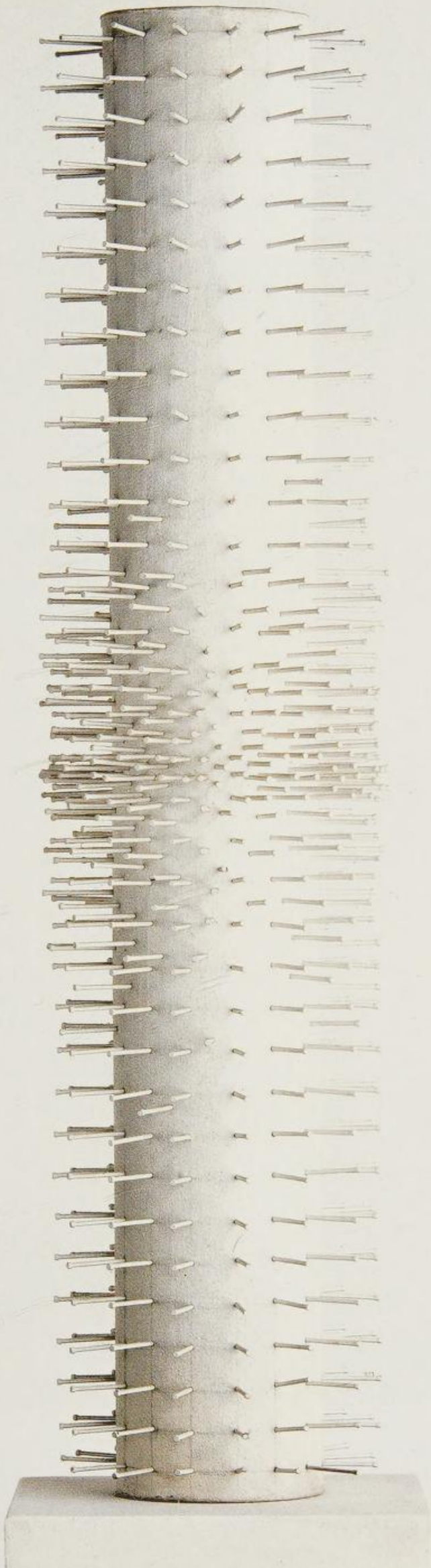
esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön

piero manzoni

Achrome, 1959
Kaolin on canvas
61.5 x 75.5 cm
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot o



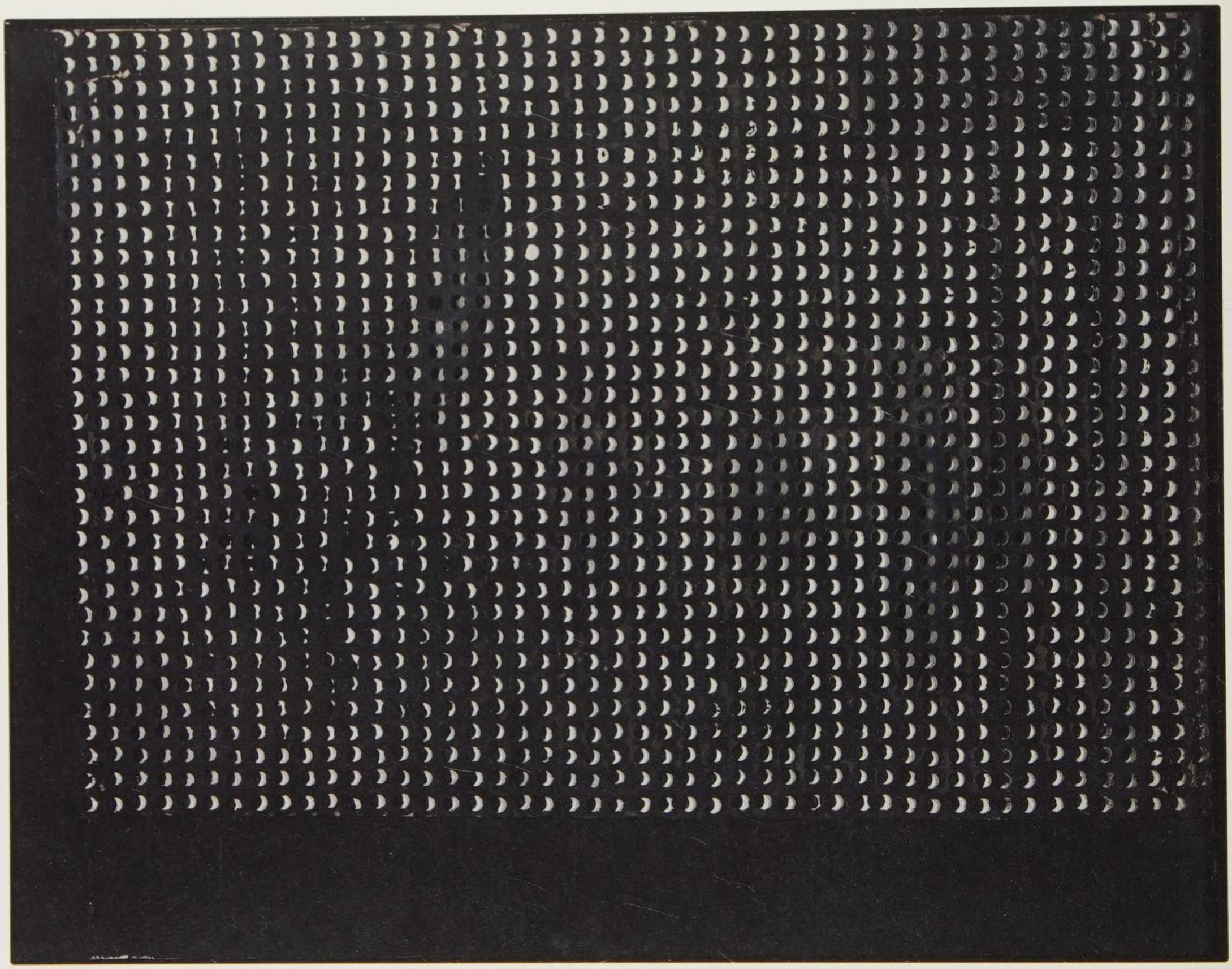
günther uecker

Unvollendete Säule, 1959
Unfinished Column, 1959
Nails and graphite on canvas mounted on cardboard, spray painted
H. 70 cm, Ø 16 cm
Private Collection

grün indigo blau blau violett Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und Silber, Scha

otto piene

Proliferation of the Moon, 1957
Oil on perforated cardboard on canvas
80 x 100 cm
Private Collection, Düsseldorf



und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero ist rund. Zero ist Zero. Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der A

otto piene

Licht Ballett, 1969
Light Ballet, 1969
Chrome, glass, light bulbs
Ø 38, Ø 124.5 cm
Moeller Fine Art, New York

o ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zerō. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste



interview with heinz mack

hans ulrich obrist*

Ben Brown Gallery, London
4 October 2010

Hans Ulrich Obrist *First of all I wish to ask you how it all started. How did you come to art, or how did art come to you?*

Heinz Mack Somehow there was no alternative. That sounds a little bit exaggerated, but it's a fact that at the end of the war, when I was growing up, education was really in a bad state. I was surrounded by ruins and problems. I changed schools very often, because sometimes teachers didn't come back from the war, or sometimes buildings had been destroyed. Anyhow, I passed the examination for higher education. I had already applied to the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf, and I was accepted, so I spent my first years as a student in Düsseldorf.

It was the intention of my parents, my friends and my relatives that I should become a musician, play the piano; but that did not happen. To cut a long story short, one day a completely drunk black soldier attacked me exclaiming 'I'll kill you!' Fortunately he couldn't succeed, or else I wouldn't be here [laughs]. But my left little finger was injured, almost lost, so I used that chance to give up the career of a musician.

HUO *What is so fascinating is that at that time it was a much more isolated art world than it is now; in Germany after the war there wasn't a lot of information, yet you very early on connected to the international art world. How did you so early meet Fontana and many other artists?*

HM This is an important question and needs a lot of answers, but to give a short comment, in those days we really felt lost somehow. No information around, no books, no literature, no examples in museums. People were involved in quite different problems. I'm speaking of the years between 1950 and 1960. And of course at the academy there was a very conservative education, and the teachers had been in the war too. Just to mention one example, Paul Klee, a very famous teacher at the Academy of Fine Arts in Düsseldorf was thrown out by the Nazis, and it happened to other well-known artists too. The result was that we —my friends like Piene, Uecker and myself— had a kind of self-education.

At the same time there was really an extreme desire and longing to cross over the borders in Europe, and that was difficult too, because in 1950 it took almost one day to go from Düsseldorf to Paris by train. Paris was the first capital in my life not in ruins, so as you can imagine, I was most impressed by the city. And this intention to get a better view of the world, made me run to Paris, to Belgium, Amsterdam, Antwerp, Milan, Vienna and so on. In Paris I met Yves Klein in 1958, and by my assistance and by my enthusiasm, the only gallery involved in modern art, Schmela in Düsseldorf, organized the very first exhibition of Yves Klein in Germany.

Just twenty kilometers away from Düsseldorf there's another town called Krefeld with a beautiful museum of modern art built in the mid-thirties by Mies van der Rohe. As the director, he had organized the very first museum exhibition of works by Klein, Tinguely, Arman, Mack and Piene. I

*Hans Ulrich Obrist is curator, art critic and art historian.

went to Milan, and artists from Milan like Piero Manzoni and Enrico Castellani in turn visited me. I'm proud to mention that Enrico Castellani just got the esteemed Japanese Imperial prize. The Praemium Imperiale is the most reputed art prize, it's a kind of Nobel Prize for the arts and it goes with a high amount of money; unfortunately I didn't get it, but he got it, so it's OK. [laughs]

This was really exciting. In Milan I realized that people like Piero Manzoni, Castellani as well as other artists were most impressed and influenced by Lucio Fontana. Even nowadays, Fontana gets mentioned as the so-called 'father' of the ZERO group. But Piene, my friend and fellow artist and I are the founders of the ZERO group. Fontana was never my father, although he could have been, because when I met him he was an older man born in 1899 and I was still a young guy born in 1931. He was not our father, but he was—I really insist on this—a kind of friend, a kind of colleague. When I went to Paris, I had my first exhibition in the well-known but small gallery of Iris Clert, who came from Greece and opened it on Rue des Beaux-Arts. There I met a lot of artists like Spoerri, Arman, and Yves Klein.

When I went to Milan a year or two later I was impressed, almost a bit shocked, when I entered Lucio Fontana's studio, and saw that a little relief made by my own hands was hanging on the wall! I asked him, 'What made you have this little piece of Heinz Mack?' He said that he had seen it, was enthusiastic about it, and he's really happy to meet the artist who had done it – and that was the only piece of my art that had ever been sold in ten years in Paris! [Laughter]

HUO *This connection to Fontana is wonderful. To come back to what had happened in Germany, I wonder if we can talk a little bit more about what happened at that time, around '58 in Düsseldorf? I spoke to Gustav Metzger some months ago; he said we always talk about the amazing things that happened in the sixties, like the revolution of '68, but it was all being prepared in the fifties. There is a very interesting book called* 1959, *which summarizes all the things that had been invented around '58–'59. It was a real explosion, wasn't it, in terms of space travel, in terms of ideas in science and in art, and you're very much a part of that. Can you tell us about how this all came about, and what triggered ZERO? Do you remember the day when it was invented?*

HM: No, not the day – perhaps the night! [Laughter]. Perhaps we had been a little bit drunk, I don't know. My studio had a courtyard and it was dangerous to step into the courtyard, because there was a big wall destroyed by the war, and we were afraid that if a very strong wind blew the thing would collapse. The roof of the studio had many big holes, struck by the wind and storms. The right part of this building was my studio, and I even had a little sleeping room. To the left there was the studio of Mr. Piene.

We did our best and it was really sensational if somebody came in to visit us, once a month if at all. So we thought we should do something to draw attention to the fact that we were living and working there. We cleaned the whole studio, painted it white and exhibited our work. Only for one night. We called it 'The Evening Exhibition'. We invited our friends, and our friends invited their friends, a kind of chain reaction, and all of a sudden after some months whenever there was an evening exhibition it was the highlight of that time.

The general point of my short story is that it was a very serious, a very distinctive and a very hard decision to forget everything that we had learned until that day. We wanted to start from the very beginning, in other words prepare an absolutely clean canvas, like the Fontana canvas for instance, and ask ourselves what can be done without destroying the canvas. We were aware that this was not a kind of destroyed canvas, it was a transformed canvas; you forget about the canvas.

This intention to start from the very beginning was really exciting and was really— compared with everything else that happened in Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, and in Italy— completely different. It caused a lot of public attention.

Nowadays a lot of grown up people, who have lost their hair like me, come and say, 'What ZERO did in those days inspired us.' But we were young then, and what we learned was that not only art should have a very new beginning. We went outside of our studios and worked even in on the streets, and we were coerced by the police, because working on the streets was not allowed.

HUO *So some projects were censored by the police?*

HM The police didn't like it; they said, 'You are disturbing the civilization of our town', it was a kind of confrontation, a kind of provocation. We did our work very peacefully and very joyfully, but the society that had just started, at least in Germany, to forget about the war, and was trying a new approach to economic civilization was interested in quite different fields.

HUO *What is fascinating is that today we live in a time when we no longer have artistic movements. In the early twentieth century there were movements with manifestos, and in fifties and sixties there was this idea of the movement. I think it's very fascinating now to look back at those times and think about this idea of the movement. What was your connection to the historic avant-gardes? To which extent were you inspired by the manifestos of Futurism, of Dadaism?*

HM Dadaism was not a serious movement for us; it was more like a joyful company to our serious intentions. We didn't want to go on with what had ended in 1933, so, I repeat, we had to start from the very beginning. One of the ideas that fascinated us was movement and space, so we started with kinetic work, we started to do objects that didn't have a single identity; furthermore, these objects started to depend on the various standpoints of the viewer or on the existing light. So whatever happened to an object in terms of kinetic art it became livelier; it was a desire to further connect the art object and our life.

A very important thing in those days was the discovery of jazz music, it was very sensational for us after all those stupid songs of the Third Reich. So it was a certain movement of temperament, of evolution, of energy, energy of sounds and music and light. We worked together; in other words there was a kind of cooperation, a collaboration of various artists just doing one work. This was another attempt to get rid of the idea that art only belongs to one person.

HUO *What happened in Antwerp in '59?*

HM A very important exhibition was held there, because Tinguely and a Belgian artist wrote letters to all artists they knew and invited them. 'Come over to Antwerp,' they said. There was a huge old house, almost 600 years old, which had a huge timberwork roof. The building was so big you could even drive a motorcycle inside, and it was offered to us. Each artist was invited to be responsible for his own work. There was no curator around, no museum director, no dealer, it was really up to the artist. I admire it even today because nowadays everything gets organized and things are so important. Everything is important for the art world, done by Sotheby's, by Christie's, by museum directors, by the curator of the Tate Gallery, and so on. Sometimes you'll see an invitation or an advertisement in magazines and art magazines, and you read the name of the curator *that* high and somewhere below on the page the name of the artist only *that* high, so this gives you an idea what I'm talking about.

HUO *But it was self-organized; the interesting thing is, many great exhibitions in the twentieth century, and I suppose that's still the case now, were self-organized by artists. And that's the case for many of your early shows, they were self-organized.*

HM Absolutely right, and curators, directors of museums and galleries had been friends of the artists, and that really worked.

HUO *You had these group activities, and obviously it had a lot to do with these ever-changing constellations. The ZERO group exchanged a lot, but you also very early on presented your own work; you participated at a very early stage in the documenta, you had solo shows like the exhibition at Galerie Diogenes, Berlin in 1960. I wonder if we could talk a little bit about this show, because it's very important and because we have all these kinetic elements, there are reliefs, rotors, and cubes.*

HM Some of these pieces turn, vibrate, affected by a motor or by the wind, by a ventilator for instance. For the first rotors, because of lack of money and material, I just took paper and first experimented on the turntable. That was the first record player I bought. I put pieces of paper on top of this plate and let it turn. The main thing was that over this rotating platform of papers I hold with my hands, but just by accident, a sheet of glass with waves. And by these waves, the whole structure

became irritated, and in other words, alongside the real movement, a virtual movement happened at the same time.

HUO *So that was the invention really of that whole rotor series. It's also interesting because they have a link to scientific experiments. What's the connection to science? Do you have a connection to science and scientists? Gustav Metzger told me he was always reading science magazines in '59.*

HM It was the time when I developed my first rotors. At the time I was doing a lot of experiments. And there was an election. Posters pasted all around the town for our former chancellor, Mr [Konrad] Adenauer, declared: 'Vote Adenauer in the new election' and a big line said: 'No Experiments'. I was still young and full of controversial feelings, so I took a pot of black paint, and covered the line 'no experiments' with black paint and made it unreadable. I continued to do so quite a lot of time and then I was stopped by the police. [laughter] … The main thing is that without experiments, life doesn't make sense. It sounds very simple, but even a man like Picasso depended on experiments. And when something happens during an experiment that you didn't arrange, it becomes really exciting. That made me interested in what happens in science, because in science inventors have the same procedure, they start their work with a kind of target in front of them, but during this unexpected things happen. And this is one of the main senses of invention, that you discover things you never had dreamt of.

HUO *Which happened to you, somehow, no?*

HM Somehow that happened, yes. When a typical aluminum rotor turns around behind glass with waves it becomes a very fascinating, even strange illusion, you have a feeling that you are looking at the sea; if the wind gives a certain structure to the sea and the light starts to reflect on this moving surface of the sea, or the wake of a boat. All this is somehow typical for scientific courses and laws, but I like to use them also, as long as this illusion is not naturalistic, it's really on a upper level of imagination.

HUO *Then there is the Forest of Light.*

HM Yes. In the *Forest of Light*, the steles made up of glass, metal and lenses reflect the light. In one piece in which there are a lot of lenses catching the light, the whole group is a kind of document for my intention to create a certain interaction between different pieces, like in a family. In a family each person has his own value and singularity but, all in all, belonging to each other, it's a plural society, a little one. In this little society of the family each person is acting in a way that will give some effort to the next person, and vice versa. This interaction happens here too: the piece itself, if you put it by itself in a room, can be most senseful, but it does have a certain function and meaning as soon as it comes together with other ones like this, then it comes up to a very interesting kind of speech between all these different persons.

My very first show in New York was done in that way too; it was called 'A Forest of Light' because I was very fond of the forest where I have grown up. It was a kind of reflection to the Manhattan area. The Manhattan structure with all those houses influenced me consciously or unconsciously anyhow, and it could be something like a reflection on the Manhattan experience. I have a very early work called *New York, New York*. During the time I spent in New York, from 1962 to 1964, the Howard Wise Gallery was very kind to sponsor my work; they gave me a certain amount of money each month so I could go on with my work without thinking for my daily bread and coffee.

HUO *One thing which is also interesting in terms of experiments is that there are things which are time-based, they're almost like a happening. Can you tell me about* Homage to Georges de la Tour? *What happened in 1960?*

HM By accident I discovered a beautiful painting, it is now in the main gallery for classical paintings in Berlin. Georges de la Tour was very fond of light, and in that painting the flame of the candle is designed like an ornament, it was very beautifully done. The whole space of this picture, the whole thematic/magic of the scene is influenced by this little flame. He was one of the very first painters in the world concentrating on light. Other artists had been there too, like Caravaggio and so on, but he was really one of the very special artists. I wanted to do a kind of homage to this old master, and many of my

friends were a little bit disappointed or astonished when they heard that I started to concentrate on classical art.

I won't hesitate to mention that nowadays you meet a lot of younger artists who don't have any education on art history, it's really a shame. So I am a bit proud that I've spent three days in London in The National Gallery and The British Museum. I cannot but look at all those old pieces of art, which are as lively as my own work or even livelier; it means a lot to me to be related to the historical background of the culture.

It is a happening, but in those days the word 'happening' didn't exist. Anyhow, it was a kind of demonstration in the Schmela Gallery in Düsseldorf, and he was ready to leave his gallery in order to move into another, more convenient building. Before he gave up his gallery in the old part of Düsseldorf, where everybody could look through the window, he invited artists like Joseph Beuys, Günther Uecker, Heinz Mack, to do a kind of demonstration, let's call it a happening, just for a couple of days, then he would close the door and leave the gallery.

So I covered the whole gallery… [with candles]. Candles had been well known during the war because we were not allowed to have big bulbs of light. We took this little candlelight with us into the cellar or basement of the house. This was obviously something I couldn't forget, this little candlelight in the dark cellar during the war. And I completely filled the place with all these little candles and their light was reflected by the silver foil around. So this was a kind of homage to Georges de la Tour.

HUO *But it's interesting also because we spoke about childhood, the Schwarzwald, the forest, and now the childhood memory of the cellar. Which was the first museum you visited as a child?*

HM The Louvre was really the very first museum in my life. When I came to Paris in 1950, I went to the Grand Palais, and inside there was a show organized by Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, and it was just a dozen paintings, with a very beautiful painting done by Matisse of just a basket with oranges and orange leaves, placed on a table with a beautifully decorated tablecloth. I was crazy about this painting because for me it was just the climax of quality: I thought, 'This means painting.' Many years later I realized, just by accident, that this painting was one of the very few which Picasso bought with his money, so that means something, compared to my little piece bought by Mr Fontana, this means something. And next to it was a painting of Miró, I had never heard his name before, and when I came back to the academy, it was the year 1950, I mentioned that I had seen miraculous paintings. And not a single teacher had ever heard about this name, neither had the students, so this was very exciting.

HUO *Now before we move onto documenta and Venice Biennales in which you participated very early on, I have one last question about the idea of time. Obviously in museums artists are given space, and one of the things in your work, which has inspired a lot of younger artists since the nineties, and particularly in the last years, is the way in which ZERO has actually worked not only with space, but also with time.*

You mentioned these ZERO nights in Düsseldorf, we have here something which today one would call a performance or a happening, but you've also organized all kinds of other time-based ZERO events. In the catalogue of the earlier exhibition there are some totally fascinating photographs: one is a proposal of yours where you designed the ZERO-Fest in Rolandseck, and then there is also a plate, a catering service, where you have the ZERO on it, and then there is an entry ticket stamped on Heinz Mack's hand for the ZERO party which is a big zero.

I was wondering about this whole idea of time-based things; what was that ZERO-Fest?

HM The station was built for the ceremonial effect, it was a station like the train station, like all the other ones, but it was mainly done for people of this nobility area, it was a kind of… let's call it a clubhouse. Very famous people had been in this house too: the mother of Queen Elizabeth, Winston Churchill, and Thomas Wolfe, the writer, had been there; very international persons had been invited for cultural events which happened in this little, old-fashioned looking train station.

It became a very, very important place for us because the man who had been ordered to take care of it was a great friend of us and of modern art, so we were invited to do whatever we wanted to do, but there was no money around, so of course we

couldn't do *whatever* we wanted to do. Anyhow it was an exciting place.

Nowadays it's an international museum; it was enlarged by the famous American architect Richard Meier, who also built the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. In the main space of this station, a kind of festival *sala*, a dozen huge mirrors were placed on each side of the wall, six big mirrors on one side, six on the other side, and all the same height as your space here. Of course, caused by the years, these mirrors were a little bit deformed by patina. They were already old. Nevertheless I was very enthusiastic about them, because somehow they looked like 'done by Heinz Mack', so I went from mirror to mirror and signed each mirror.

So that was a 'happening', but it was taken seriously. Then, at the end of the ZERO movement—which existed for ten years, from 1957 to 1967—there came a day when I started to complain about the fact that a group of artists, a group of friends doing a kind of group work, cannot go on that way forever, because then there is the danger of it becoming a kind of institution, and that was exactly what I was fighting against. I said, 'Each artist has to be as free as possible, only responsible for his own production.' The time when we all assisted each other, crossing all these borders and frontiers, this time was gone.

Of course it was an exciting time. I remember not long ago there was an interview and Mr Piene was asked, 'Did you have a painting by Fontana when you went to Milan?' 'Yes,' he said, 'That happened. When I was stopped by the customs people at the border they asked me, "What about this painting? It seems to be destroyed."' And Piene said, 'Yes, it's destroyed.' 'Then you can go.' [Laughter]

I passed from Paris to Düsseldorf with a painting of Yves Klein just small enough to fit into my Volkswagen. Before, Yves Klein had offered me a larger painting—nowadays worth millions—but we had to take it back to his studio because it didn't fit into the Volkswagen!

Anyhow, the one I could put at the back of my Volkswagen was in a good condition and it was not packed, there was just a blanket on top of it. The customs official asked, 'What's that?' I said, 'It's a painting but it's not ready, it's not yet finished.' And he was offended and told me in French, 'Of course I know that it's not unrealized or unfinished!' [laughs]

HUO *And we're back to Fontana. The ZERO Lichtraum [The Light Room], the happening which took place in Fridericianum. It's fantastic how you transformed this found situation, and I think all these ZERO time-based events are incredibly interesting. The ZERO Lichtraum, I think that was at documenta'64, and it's ZERO's homage to Fontana.*

HM That was the most important collaboration between Günther Uecker, Otto Piene and me. It was interesting too that in the beginning only Uecker was invited and he insisted on having us invited too, otherwise he wouldn't accept the invitation. This was really a moral statement of real moral stability to say, 'Without my friends I'm not here.' So then we were invited, and we all started to work at the last minute and we didn't get a beautiful *sala* like this, we got only a roof from the museum, the inside of the roof. In the Fridericianum, in that very famous castle, and it was overflowing with garbage and dirt, we had to clean everything before we could do the installation. The walls were very rough, not painted at all. We put our piece inside this huge space in order to make clear for the public that this was a kind of homage to Fontana. It was my idea to demonstrate it by projecting a painting of Fontana with a projector to the wall. So Fontana was part of the exhibition, of our installation. He was there and he was not there.

HUO *Like a ghost or something.*

HM Yes, like a ghost. Everything was real, but the Fontana piece was just a virtual appearance. That was really striking because in those days even the famous documenta refused to have Fontana exhibited in their halls; they offered him a place near a staircase going to the WC.

HUO *What about your cubes?*

HM First I have a small point to make. All in all, my work does not relate to one idea only, there are one hundred to one thousand ideas, and I'm always changing and doing a different work, and it results in a kind of company of different works. Some pieces belong to each other like sisters and brothers, and others are very distant relatives.

So what I'm going to say is that my work is very spectral and have a lot of variations. I think I'm allowed to mention that

it has influenced many younger artists during the last ten years, and whenever I see something which is not so far away from what I have done many years ago, I collect it in a big box for history. Now, about my cubes: For example, there is one totally black done by hand, and it's a very strange thing that has happened fifty years ago. The structure of the cube has a major similarity to chips in today's computer world, and when I did this, those chips had not existed at all. So it's a very strange coincidence, and that happened to a lot of my work, which now do have an amazing and astonishing similarity to what happens in science.

A very short comment: my work is free from compositions. I don't like the word composition at all, it is a word that belongs to the history of European art. And now we don't see the world anymore in terms of composition, where different parts of the world go together to make a kind of construction, and science doesn't see the work like you see it if you look outside into a park or in a landscape, they look into the electronic microscope, and what they are seeing is very tiny, it's a micro world, and this micro world is the world of science nowadays. And the same point of view, the same direction of searching concerns the world of stars around us.

HUO *We should speak a little bit about the Sahara, because the Sahara Project is relevant for many young artists now, because we could observe over the last years, that from Pierre Huyghe to Philippe Parreno, many artists have done expeditions. You've done, early on, expeditions, which are interesting also in relation to ecology, because you've done them in the Arctic and in the desert. Can you tell us about these?*

HM It was my general idea to get out of the world of museums, to leave this fear of galleries and institutions. I wanted to get free of the rules of commercial art and it was my intention to get new experience in new spaces.

I complained about the space around us: 'Completely overdone, overfilled with furniture, of civilization.' And going around with a cab through London I have exactly the same feeling again: everything's totally overcrowded and I don't know where to look at and if you ask me, 'What have you seen?' it is difficult to find an answer.

What I am going to say is this: this overfurnished world with all kinds of human inventions frightened me totally, and it was a big longing to get out of this world and to enter a world absolutely free from the fingerprints of civilization – whatever you see here around is full of fingerprints of civilization.

Of course one can be proud of that because England for instance is, compared with all other countries in the world, the most civilized nation, but somehow you become a prisoner of this kind of installments around you.

This desire was so strong that I started to dream and to develop a certain conception of work in the art world that can only be realized under the conditions of a completely untouched area in a completely open space, so it's really a kind of mirage in my consciousness. An area of our world not spoiled by human beings.

This was very important, and unfortunately I could not get it realized as I wanted to have it realized: a one hour long movie and a lot of experiments had been done, no doubt about this, and some books had been published, even in America. There was a big show in Los Angeles at the County Museum devoted to the work of land art, and they did a research in the history of land art and discovered that I perhaps might be one of the very first ones in the world who started this land art.

HUO *We've talked a lot about the past but I think now we must talk about what you're doing now. I visited the studio and it's an incredibly active studio, with paintings, sculpture, and installations. Can you tell us about your studio?*

HM Yes. It is a studio where no color is around… except my pullover! [Laughter] But it is the clean atmosphere, a pure atmosphere which I admire very much and I like to be there. My paintings or my reliefs don't depend on color, but I also mentioned only a painter who is very rich in experience with colors will be able to paint a painting *without* color. In fact I'm depending very much on colors, so I risk to bring color to its own power, to its own space for extension, and in a very high level, controlled field.

As I said of composition, instead of macro I prefer micro. Structure means a lot to me, and this means I'm very near to what's going on in the sciences for many

dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himm

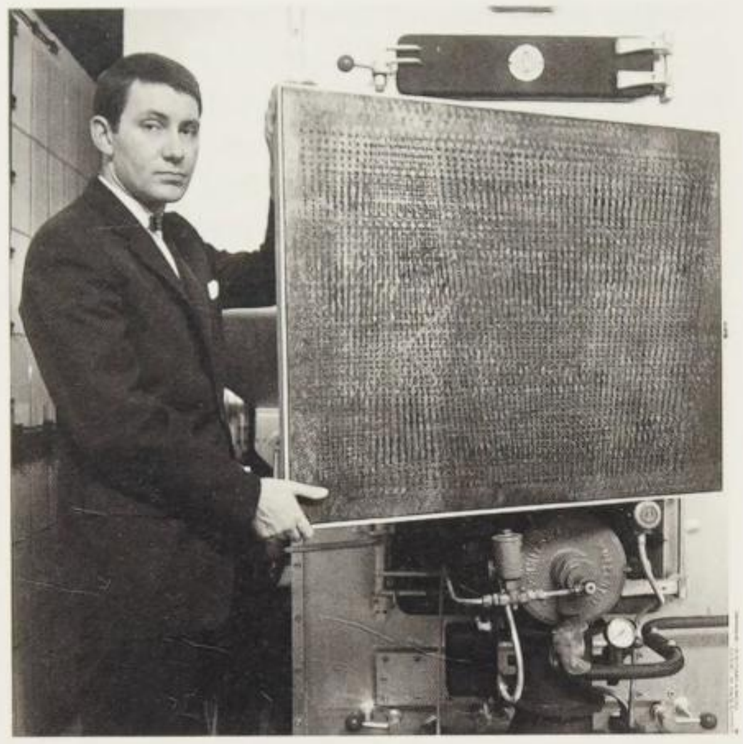
years. It's fascinating for me too that the main inventors in the science field started to get in touch with me, I didn't ask for this, they did it.

There is a huge difference of knowledge and education between a scientist and an artist, but I learned, or I had a feeling that high personalities of science always have a certain freedom in reacting to things which are not directly related to their own work, they have a feeling that this belongs to the whole world. When I was a young man, I had the pleasure to meet personally the inventor of the atom *spaltung*. Mr Otto Hahn, the Nobel Prize winner. We had been born in the same province of Germany and he was very kind to me. Since that time science means something to me, and I tried to learn by getting in touch with these people.

HUO *I've got one very last question: Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a lovely little book which is an advice to a young poet, and I was wondering, given your immense experience, what would be, in 2010, your advice to a young artist?*

HM Don't work too much, life is too short! [Laughter]

(Abridged and edited version)



interview with otto piene

hans ulrich obrist*

2011

Hans Ulrich Obrist *To start with, I would like to ask you about your beginnings. How you came to art and how art came to you.*

Otto Piene I think my mother and my grandmother encouraged me to draw and my grandmother stretched the first canvas for me when I was about ten. In the Second World War things were scarce, but an uncle of mine was an architect and professor at Technische Hochschule in Breslau. He brought me a set of oil paints, and I did my first oil painting on the canvas.

HUO *Who were your heroes then?*

OP When I was thirteen or fourteen, I liked Lovis Corinth. My parents had a library. I read a book on the portrait painter Leo von König. Later, I discovered in my mother's library books on Paula Becker-Modersohn and German Expressionists. But I didn't meet any real painter until after the war. When I was about sixteen, I went to Münich to show my portfolio to Adolf Hartmann, who was then an important person in Münich's art life. He passed me on to an artist couple, who owned and operated an art school in Münich (Blocherer Schule). I spent the first two semesters of my education in 1948 in this private art school.

HUO *What is your number one entry in your catalogue raisonné where you felt you had found your language?*

OP The stencil paintings, that was in 1956 – 1957 in Düsseldorf. I was involved in not just painting and drawing, but also metal work and some enamel work. I perforated metal panels, shone light through them, and inspired by that I made stencils out of cardboards and used them to strain oil paint on to canvases. That resulted in the *Rasterbilder*. I also shone light through the cardboard screens and that was the beginning of the light-drawings and the light-ballets. In the summer of 1957, I made forty such panels and then I blew smoke through them so that was also the beginning of the smoke drawings, and another step beyond that was to use fire. It's a fairly plausible succession of steps.

HUO *This interest in science, when did that start?*

OP My father was a physicist and a gymnasium director, and played with things like neon and argon light for me, because he thought they would interest me. Other things happened later, including the war and all that came with the war: life and death phenomena, sensations in the sky, opportunity to look at them from a distance, things burning close by –all with an aesthetic side to them, if one had the guts to step back, or lie on one's back to 'see' how much noise they made or how threatening or dangerous they were.

HUO *Uecker told me that the nails he came up with in '56 were all an attempt to create protection for his sisters and his mother during the war, so I was wondering how your work relates to the war experience.*

*Hans Ulrich Obrist is curator, art critic and art historian.

OP My fascination with light is probably a result of the war, because during the war there was blackout imposed by law, and when the war was over in 1945, people were permitted to turn on their lights, and the light would shine through the windows. It was a kind of existential change and a really important experience. During the war the bright beautiful sky was the most dangerous sky, because it meant air attacks. We had a measure of security by hiding in the dark. By night things were less visible and less detectable. Light and darkness were inverted, so to speak: black is good, light is bad. 'Back to normal' was important for my entire generation.

HUO *In 1957, together with Heinz Mack you formed the group ZERO. So many things seem to have crystalized in '57. Your inventions, your own work, ZERO. I was wondering how, from your point of view, ZERO started.*

OP I remember the stencil paintings of August 1957, and that was the basis for ZERO. And I remember it, because I was teaching in the fashion school in Düsseldorf at the time. I had a three-week vacation which I could spend in my studio, and concentrate on my work. I made all those stencils, and started the stencil paintings. My studio was close to Heinz Mack's, but he wasn't there either, he was travelling, so I could work with concentration. I showed the raster paintings in September in the Fourth Night Exhibition in my studio, and they made quite a stir. Starting from there, in November or maybe December, Peter Brüning, Heinz Mack and I decided that we should have a group and maybe a publication. So, next spring in April we published *ZERO 1*, which included the beginning of a somewhat methodical presentation of my ideas, of our ideas, of the beginning of ZERO. The name ZERO was brought into the picture as of December '57. And it became public with our publishing of the magazine *ZERO 1*.

HUO *Time has played such a big role in art, we have it in the Renaissance, in Rauschenberg. John Cage called Rauschenberg's white canvases 'clocks of time'. Time is also very important for ZERO. And the ZERO exhibitions had a short duration, but nevertheless became legendary.*

OP At the time people didn't think so. Only a few said it's sensational, a revolutionary stance, but it was very 'private'. Much of our artwork was then done at night. We were teaching during the day. We wrote ZERO texts and stuff in the off hours in the pubs, because there we could sit and use the light and come up with words and sentences and ideas.

HUO *You said once in an interview that ZERO was not really meant to be a movement, rather it was a friendship. Mack had a studio next to yours, and maybe similar attitudes towards art. Could you say it was more a pragmatic alliance, not an ideological alliance like the Japanese metabolists?*

OP Perhaps both, but I think the most important was the spiritual alliance. After we founded ZERO and the *ZERO 1* magazine, people paid attention, and we invited artists from neighboring countries, e.g. from Paris and Milan. We talked to them, and the exchange was fiery, so to speak. It was really instant friendship. So in that respect it is true that ZERO was based on friendship, but the friendships resulted in shared ideas, and shared enthusiasm, energy and shared vision, if I may use that word. And it continued for a very intense period, until people became known in the art world, and travelled more, and became successful. At the beginning ZERO had a real, very personal and very human aspect; it was less oriented toward worldly success. Initially we started in this Gladbacherstrasse 69 studio. It was nothing but a hospitable place for semi-public activity; on the other hand, the night exhibitions were interesting. They were in an unusual place, and the people in Düsseldorf liked that, and because the exhibitions were different from those in the emerging new art institutions, it had a very strong human aspect. ZERO was very much based on friendships indeed, and energy was generated very fast.

HUO *Can you talk about the ZERO manifesto, because it says that ZERO is silence, it's the beginning, it's round, it rotates, the moon, the sun, it's white etc. Uecker told me that it was your idea to incorporate the ideas of your philosophical teachings.*

OP I have studied philosophy either as long as I've studied art, or even longer. I worked during the day and at night I attended philosophy classes at the University of Cologne. I learned more from my philosophy teacher Bruno Liebrucks, than

h wache Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume in

I learned from my art teachers, because his approach to life and to academics was much superior. In Düsseldorf Academy, in the class next to ours, there was a man, Günter Grass, a sculpture student of Prof. Magas. Grass became a writer and a political success. What I mean is that there were some interesting people around us. I think the most interesting one was an art student, Beuys. We were good friends in the 'scene' in Düsseldorf. Existential philosophy and Liebrucks' plausible insights into artists' intellectual energy fired our thinking. I never had a personal conversation with this teacher; it wasn't the habit in academic institutions at the time. After I had left the university, in a completely different context, I realized that he had actually paid attention to me and knew pretty well what I was doing. But I have never tried to paint philosophy and I have never tried to 'illustrate' teachings.

HUO *You have always been interested in the development of modern architecture. Can you tell us about this?*

OP I had architect friends, and there was a department of architecture in the Düsseldorf Art Academy, with good students and some good teachers. Then, of course, literature about architecture kept appearing for the first time in the '50s. I also had architects in my family. My mother's brother, Reinhold Niemeyer, was the founder of the Academy of City Planning. He was a very active man with a broad view of architecture and its role in the world of public life. Much later I came to MIT and worked with architects again; I was then a professor in the School of Architecture and Planning at MIT, and became director of CAVS, the Center for Advanced Visual Studies, founded by Gyorgy Kepes, for about twenty years. CAVS was a unit of the School of Architecture and Planning, so there again, I had much to do with architecture and I have always been interested in what architects were doing.

HUO *Do you have unrealized architectural projects, utopic projects, cities you wanted to build?*

OP Yes I have. I did know Soleri. He is the kind of architect who has interested me the minute he appeared on the architecture horizon, or in the reality. And some of the architecture projects that are unrealized so far are essentially sky art projects. I mean this art is also the art of mobile and flying architecture and there is my interest in buildings, anthropomorphic and in urban organizations related to content such as portable media complexes, neighborhoods of media, e.g. sound cities, flying and subterranean light cities.

HUO *The link to architecture also leads us to Yves Klein who collaborated with the architect Claude Parent. Raymond Hains told me also about this cosmic drive of Yves, that Yves often talked about cosmic architecture.*

OP Yves and I were very good friends. We came to be friends first in Düsseldorf. Yves and I made a pact: we would not get into each other's hair about using fire as a medium, and painting in other ways. This pact has really worked well. The cosmic element was of course encouraged by my war experiences, you know if you spend your nights staring at the night sky, the cosmos good and the cosmos bad, half knowing it and trying to understand, then it becomes life altogether. And this love of the cosmos, this enormous orb, was the awe of ZERO and a very important element of Yves, of his philosophy, his 'issues' and his art. The artists of the group ZERO are dedicated to the love and the admiration of the cosmos.

HUO *I have recently been thinking a lot about Fontana. Born in 1900, Fontana became more radical with age. He said the artist must have the courage to stop idolizing himself, to stop seeing himself as the center of the earth. In one of his lost interviews Fontana said art was going to be a completely different thing – neither an object, nor a form. In terms of ZERO and you and your work in Germany, to which extent Fontana has influenced you?*

OP I met Fontana fairly late, and I know exactly the moment I met him: in the Gallery Stadler in Paris, in a Tàpies exhibition. Later, I was the speaker at the opening of the first Fontana one-man show at the Leverkusen museum, Schloss Morsbroich. Fontana was quite a wonderful man, he was a gentleman, a lover of the world and the universe, and this beautiful artist had richness of mind and gifts of the heart. So yes, Fontana was very important, although not present in the beginning of ZERO. But in '59 I think, Mack and I, at the documenta in Kassel, we searched for Fontana's works, found two small paintings, and we thought he

was very under-represented, way below what he deserved. That's why we called the ZERO collaborative environment we created at the documenta, *Hommage à Fontana*. documenta gave the first big emphasis on American Expressionism. It was there that I saw a Fontana painting for the first time. I heard the name Fontana first when Kricke, who was this terrific sculptor in Düsseldorf, strong and opinionated but also extra bright artist said, 'Oh, that's like Fontana', and I said 'Who's that?' I did not know who Fontana was, but on the other hand when I first saw the Fontana paintings, I said 'this is beautiful'. So I am very flattered if somebody compares me to Fontana.

HUO *Can you tell me how the word 'Zero' was found?*

OP I remember the occasion very well. It was to do with the idea of an exhibition and publication. It was at Fatty's Atelier, an artists' restaurant in Düsseldorf, where Heinz Mack, Hans Salentin, a photographer called Wehling and I talked about a name for an exhibition. This was in 1957, the restaurant was across from Galerie Schmela, and I suggested initially something like 'chiaro' or 'puro', then I said, I would like to call it Zero, but that would be too easily interpreted as an expression of Nihilism and Negativism, so we dropped it for half an hour. Then one of us said, yes, how about Zero? We knew that people would associate it with sentimental existentialism or something like that, but we decided it would be good, let's call it that. *ZERO* came out, it was in April '58. From then on we used the name Gruppe ZERO in our correspondence. The group has never been formally organized, there was never a founding action, but ZERO just happened because we used it as a trademark, and in catalogues and on posters and invitations it looked and sounded right. It just caught on immediately.

HUO *And I was wondering how you in relation to ZERO and your work in general would define the word 'utopia'.*

OP We used the word often. When ZERO first appeared in Düsseldorf, it was heavily criticized by the local press in Düsseldorf. One of the writers was Karl Ruhrberg, a former sports reporter, ascended to writing reviews of art exhibitions. He wrote this nearly sadistic article entitled 'The Revolution of the Art Teacher'. The same Karl Ruhrberg later became the head of the DAAD, and the head of the Cologne Museum, Wallraf-Richartz-Museum, and a little later, he publicly apologized for that mean review at the time. ZERO was pretty much forced to fight its way into the public consciousness so to speak, but after two or three years it became an international force.

HUO *After the early stencil works and the founding of ZERO your next epiphany was the* Light Ballet. *Do you remember the day you created the* Light Ballet*? I know that one of the first public appearances was in Mary Bauermeister's studio.*

OP Mary Bauermeister was Stockhausen's wife. The *Light Ballet* was not shown in her studio first, but it was the beginning of the light ballet. It started in a very simple way with handmade screens and flash lights, and then developed to the use of colors and somewhat more potent light sources. I played the *Light Ballet* in public first at the opening of my very first one-man show at the Galerie Schmela in 1959. It strongly affected those at the Galerie Schmela.

HUO *One of the things we didn't talk so much about is the connection to technology. Was there a kind of epiphany for you in your work to connect to technology, or was it a gradual process?*

OP It was a gradual process, beginning when I was maybe eight years old. My father showed me in his class lab at the school, in 1936 or so, neon tubes and argon tubes and other kinetic phenomena and apparatus, which impressed me much.

HUO *Were you influenced by artists who were connected in the past to technology, or was it something you more discovered for yourself?*

OP I think there were no specifically technology-orientated artists in my early past other than those I learned right after the war, for example Bauhaus. And Gyorgy Kepes introduced me to 85- year old Gropius who invited me to lunch at Harvard Square. After World War II, literature that had been hidden or burnt or ignored before/during the war came to the surface little by little. These were usually old books. It was interesting to see what other people had learned when there was

a normal time in their lives to learn. In Germany first we had to make it through the war alive, and then little by little some of the education, some of the information became available, and of course I ate it all fast and furiously, particularly information about the Bauhaus and its 'neighbors'.

HUO *I just read Fred Kaplan's book* 1959, *which shows that many of the main discoveries of the '60s have actually already been made in the late '50s. So 1959 was the year of the space race, of new journalism for political and sexual freedom and it is also the year you created the* Light Ballet.

OP I made the first raster paintings in 1957 using the screens for the raster paintings for the *Light Ballet*. It was the key discovery I made after the raster paintings. I used other simple means such as flashlights in the Gladbacherstrasse studio. Then I showed for the first time in public, the *Light Ballet* at the opening of my very first one-man show in 1959 at the Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf. The *Light Ballet* was acknowledged, but the role of Moholy-Nagy was reinforced later when I came to Cambridge in 1968, because of the light space modulator. That was of course much later, because when I made these discoveries that led to the forming of ZERO, it was 1956-57.

HUO *How did you connect to the historic avant-garde; was it built from fragments from the past or was it more a tabula rasa moment?*

OP It was more like *tabula rasa*, because initially there was no literature. The first time I read anything by Moholy was when the photographer Manfred Tischer found some typed pages of Moholy writings and he got his wife to copy these for me. That must have been in 1959 or 1960; I had shown the *Light Ballet* for the first time, and I was trying to photograph it. One person whom I drew into the process was Manfred Tischer the photographer, who very soon became the busy documentarist for my work and for ZERO.

HUO *Some ZERO exhibitions lasted one or two days and there seems to be a very different notion of working with time.*

OP The one reason why the night exhibitions didn't last long was that I didn't have much time to spend on the exhibitions, and the same was true with Heinz Mack, who worked in the studio next to mine. We just didn't have time to attend to the needs of an exhibition during the day, because we were teaching. We were all young teachers who made a living for our young families by working in schools. I worked for a total of thirteen years at the fashion institute in Düsseldorf (Modeschule Düsseldorf), the last five years as an associate director. I taught drawing, art history and cultural history, history of costume and anatomy for artists. So in that way, I caught up with what had been going on in the world when it was shut to us, because we were not in a free country at that time. But in this case, I also have to count in Heinz Mack, whom I met in 1950 at the art academy in Düsseldorf. We met the first day. We have been friends of varying degrees and varying pains, and it started out by my being critical on what he was doing as a student, then went through various states of attraction and sympathy and criticism. We also studied philosophy at Albertus Magnus University in Cologne.

HUO *How did you invent the smoke pictures?*

OP I don't really remember the exact moment, but I do remember that it happened before I opened my first one-man show, so it must be very soon after the raster paintings, which I started in the summer of 1957. I think the smoke paintings had to do with smoking cigarettes, meaning blowing cigarette smoke through the perforated screens, and realizing that some residue of the smoke appeared on the piece of paper if I put it on top of the screen. I realized that I could do that much more effectively by using the soot of candles. It turned out to be a pretty direct process. Then I blew fixative on the soot that had settled on the paper, and a year later I started developing the fire paintings from the smoke painting process.

Those happened in pretty rapid succession. My first exhibition at Schmela consisted of raster paintings. They were all white and yellow, and next they were silver and gold. The next year I had my second show at Schmela's with smoke drawings and smoke paintings, and the year after that I had yet another show consisting mostly of fire paintings. The exhibitions opened in the presence of

Yves Klein, who at that time was very excited by the smoke paintings and fire paintings. It's not clear to this day whether my smoke and fire paintings inspired his or whether he found his own. But since we were very good friends, we made a pact that we wouldn't challenge each other as to who was first, and just do what we were doing.

HUO *When Gerry Schum featured the Television Gallery, he invited different artists to do pieces for television. How did your works for television evolve?*

OP I had, because of the night exhibitions in Düsseldorf, become acquainted with some of the German TV people in Cologne; that is how I met Wibke von Bonin. When Aldo Tambellini and I developed the *Black Gate*, I told her about it: that here was something she should be interested in, as she was the director of WDR Drei programs. She had the instinct to find this important, and together we developed a plan for the first live television performance show, called Black Gate Cologne. It happened before anything with that intensity and importance could happen in the US, where anything comparable came half a year later. 'The Medium is the Medium' happened, the artists of *Black Gate* were essentially involved again. All artists were enthusiastically observing each other's work. It was not a time of ugly competition, but a time of friendships, development and evolution. So, in this case, *Black Gate Cologne* had its origin at the *Black Gate on the Lower East Side*, and its technical advancement could be realized by the involvement of 'the media', and their big media instruments and new studios in Cologne, and there were new cameras and camera men, and editing devices, and it was a pretty important big step forward to deal with those facilities and possibilities, as opposed to the first hand-held cameras that were available earlier. When I first came to the United States to teach at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia in fall '64, the first hand-held cameras came on the market and also the Kodak Carousel projectors. So here were the tools for multi-media, and the multi-media blossomed immediately 'overnight', and the art of performance was the result. It was a very exciting period when the face of the arts changed real fast and very positively so. The enthusiasm was definitely fired by artists on the Lower East Side. Then we moved to Germany, and carried what we had in development and experience there into the big studios, the brand new TV studios in Cologne.

HUO *You invented Sky Art in 1969, and Mack also worked with landscapes. You went beyond the gallery and it obviously culminated in your work in the Summer Olympics ceremony.*

OP The influence of the war is undoubted. Towards the end of the war, there was a flak amassment at Gütersloh airbase. There was the last important, desperate battleground in World War II. I saw that incredible Messerschmidt 262, the first Düsenjäger, by the standards of the period a science fiction monster. It pulled up to the flak position that we were in. It exuded so much energy that the air around it vibrated violently, an energy drama, the first to the young people. I was sixteen, the last year of the war, that was technology and technology of the air, and the air of course was the sky. The experience left me with a lasting fascination. Daytime it was all bombing, and at night it was bombing too, but at night it was also target marking, blinding light bombs and tracers, and the cacophony of the war concert; it was incredibly fascinating, as well as incredibly frightening. There was the new technology, the new air war tools, it was of the sort of noise-making and theatrical thunder and life and death mixed inextricably in a never-to-forget degree of intensity. The night fighter planes were stationed on the airbase. They came and went, and got shot down by competing planes of the U.S and British variety, and you know, the noise and the death were among the most dramatic events of the war. It was totally forced upon us, nothing to do with desire or choice. But fortunately, like some of my fellow flak students, I lived to remember them.

HUO *And can you tell me about 1972 Munich events?*

OP The Munich Olympics; most incisive experiences telling us that one part of human nature is horrible, but it did belong to the phenomena of events that showed that our belief in the peace of the United Nations after World War II is awesome but fragile. The first event that I found disgustingly deceptive was when Khrushchev banged his shoe on his desk at the United Nations to demonstrate his independence and his enmity to the western

world. I found that horrifyingly ruthless and against all beliefs in the United Nations. It helped build a peaceful world at the time by opposition, and then came the Munich catastrophe, which was a deadly demonstration of forces that didn't like a peaceful world. The Munich Olympics was upheld by wishful thinking, and featured my *Olympic Rainbow* (which had been questioned very much, but then it was seen by many as a symbol of peace, and some people said it was a Biblical symbol).

HUO *Let's talk about MIT and your visionary work there. I have been writing and researching a lot on Gyorgy Kepes, who is the founder of CAVS. Can you tell me about your relationship to Kepes, and if he was an inspiration?*

OP Kepes was not an inspiration at first, because I didn't know him, but he obviously heard of me later and went straight to the Howard Wise Gallery, where I had my first show. He wanted to see my show, because he wanted to invite me to become a fellow at the Center that didn't exist yet, this was two years before CAVS came into being. Kepes' great merit and his great pioneering deed was to make the Center possible and to persuade MIT that this institution should house this center of questionable use to the sciences. … Kepes's greatest talent was that he could convince a lot of people, who didn't necessarily have the intellectual tools to deal with the sciences, but through Kepes's persuasive speech, quite a few people including a few artists, were impressed by what he had to say and therefore followed the invitation to become fellows at the Center. When Kepes retired and I became his successor, the Center continued with five fellows. Two years after I had taken over, we had twenty-five fellows and had built a graduate teaching program. When CAVS was founded, it was the only institution of its kind in the world, but now there are hundreds of institutions that deal with arts in connection with science and engineering.

HUO *What is your advice to a young artist?*

OP Learn science like Leonardo. And don't forget art over the excitement about sciences and new inventions. In new arts, the scientists have to work hand in hand with artists, and together pursue the poetry as well as the intelligence of science. They are equally intelligent, but intelligence comes in different forms, young people should be in the middle of it ALL. Time and time again, I see how naive some artists are in a time that is full of intelligence surrounded by gross threats and discomfort of the world, because of bad economy and bad wars. So, I think our young artists should be educated more intelligently, and the standard of education should be much higher in the arts, than it is currently. Institutions like KHM Cologne and ZKM Karlsruhe are really the right thing, they were actually both modeled on CAVS, except CAVS is small and these new institutions are much bigger and have more money, but that is not even the point. We need more art and technology institutions, so that we can have more intelligent arts.

(Abridged and edited version)

Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der W

weigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ic



interview with günther uecker

hans ulrich obrist*

Hans Ulrich Obrist *When I speak with scientists, they often can pinpoint the exact moments when their inventions took place. There are moments of epiphany. Perhaps we can talk about your most important epiphanies, focusing on the 1950s and 1960s. To begin with, what was the first epiphany you had? How have you come to art or how has art come to you?*

Günther Uecker The conditioning that I experienced in East Germany, in the years after the Second World War has been formative for my work. And artistically it all began with the first abstract painting by Kandinsky from 1910. I was able to see an exhibition of Kandinsky in West Berlin in 1951. It really moved me, as the expression of these paintings seemed very close to my own mental state. But it was not only Kandinsky, it was also a general question of the art of the early 20th Century that has shaped me. This question was, 'What is reality?' It was about finding an original approach to reality. If I draw a nude or draw a landscape or an object that I see with my eyes, I reduce it and then I change its situation in reality and transfer it down into a small-scale sketch. I follow with my pencil the form of the vagina or of the pupil of the nude model and attempt to recreate that as reality onto paper. This is a kind of absurd and surreal invention. My fist creates a line with the pencil, and that creates a reality. Mayakovsky has said 'Poetry is made with a hammer.' So the pencil is a tool I have in my hand and my emotion becomes visible with the movement of the fist. So then the work itself is a psychogrammatic sketch, which was the reality that I understood in the end.

HUO *Which is your earliest work or work as a student?*

GU The first piece, which happens to be in the National Gallery in Berlin, was a kind of a sludge painting. As if you are telling a child to eat the porridge, but it's impossible to swallow. Or as if I slip in my own vomit, so to speak. And I attempted to fix the matter of color with the help of nails. There is a very similar piece to that, *Untitled Painting Nailed Over*, from 1957. There is a dialectic between observing the world and the emotions arising from subjectivity towards the world. Contradictions unified within man are expression of his poetry. During the process of drawing there is not only the drawn line on the paper, but there is also the pencil as a vivid three-dimensional object, which casts a shadow on the paper. And with the nails it is a similar phenomenon to the pencil. In the diversity of their sequences or densifications or groupings, a complex structure emerges which allows me to shape light. Then through light quanta, like those usually found in color or elsewhere in the form of painting, and then through this structuring and grouping emerges a real space so that one could say the paintings move closer to the eye, in the way one points a finger at people.

HUO *You told me before that Wladyslaw Strzeminski as well as Malevich and*

*Hans Ulrich Obrist is curator, art critic and art historian.

ebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee,

Mondrian were important for you for these early, almost structural pieces. Who influenced you most?

GU It was Willem Sandberg, the former director of the Stedelijk museum, who had introduced me to a lot of works in Amsterdam at that time. He accompanied me while I strived to once more turn to history. Many books were destroyed here in Germany, so he helped me to find visual material. He also bought a bundle of papers by Malevich, and in these papers, the exchange of letters between Strzeminski and Malevich surfaced. And there were some statements made by Strzeminski about Malevich, where he said that Malevich is very strongly symbolic when compared to his own structural style, and that a painting hierarchy should no longer exist, and that all structures in painting are homogeneous and indifferent. That had a big influence on me, of course. But somehow we've gotten past all this actually. Now we have this structural form of the creative expression that allowed me to realize my artistic activity, the rhythm of being human and this *tremolo* that is almost comparable with musical sequences. I discussed this in the 1950s with John Cage in New York. I made an entire series of *Visual Scores* as an homage to John Cage, about the homogeneity of structure that can be a fundamental expression for human emotions or for cognitive processes. You create the world through cognition, as an analog figure of the world. That made a huge impression on me. So consequently, the material itself was the direct expression of a picture and represented nothing more than that which it is. And the structuring is basically like language, an optical language, a non-alphabetic order. Like the monotone Gregorian chants. The structures are stretched and thus become perceivable and the basis for new discoveries. It is almost as if one is on the Atlantic, or some large sea, where the surface of the water is constantly perceived in an ever-changing form.

HUO *You have always, even when we first met in the 1980s and much earlier than that, been on some sort of journey. The great journeys were important for you, weren't they?*

GU Yes, since I grew up on an island and constantly peered out over the horizon, I always thought, 'What could be out there?' I was shaped by this longing and curiosity.

HUO *The experience of childhood on an island is extremely important, but you are also part of a generation of artists influenced by the experience of war. And what I find interesting is that in multiple interviews that I read, when you were asked about the epiphany with the nails, in which the nail suddenly appears for the first time in your work in 1956, you said it was related to war events and barricaded houses. Could you talk a little about that and how this lead to the nail works in 1956?*

GU It was the attempt to create a protection for my sisters and my mother. As the front closed in, I barricaded my house from within, which was only an illusion of safety, of course. But nevertheless, it definitely gave an emotional feeling of protection. And this is what the nails represent in my work: on the one hand a defense, like ruffled hair, like a hedgehog curling up into a ball, but on the other hand tenderness. These tactile perceptions can be quite fragile and poetically sustainable in their visual perception. This has to do with the finding of a language, in its most general terms. For me, the impertinence of the intrusiveness of a nail in a piece is the non-alphabetic moment of a creative expression, which I was able to develop in the following years in that I nailed furniture, entire interiors. Like at Kowallek in Frankfurt, where an entire room was furnished, including a television, set-ups with rugs and pictures, and then I nailed everything. These everyday pieces of furniture suddenly became sacred objects.

HUO *Something I find interesting is the moment you broke away from painting. Could you say that you broke away from painting?*

GU Well, I never reached the idea of painting. I didn't have enough years behind me, enough maturity, to say, 'I am now a painter.' But I used the methods of painting. I built a stockade in order to storm the fortresses of painting, so to speak, and now I am continually on the path of failure towards painting. But it is never just painting, always only *towards* painting. And the failing is my art. As one

says, 'I am not painting pictures of the world but instead putting pictures out into the world' along with the witnesses of my inward existential presence.

HUO *That was during your time in Paris in the 1950s when you dealt with existentialism along with Sartre and Camus?*

GU Exactly. And also Bertrand Russell and Ludwig Wittgenstein, who influenced me theoretically. Those were parallel experiences.

HUO *That is interesting because as it is written in the book by Fred Kaplan,* 1959: The Year Everything, *many of the revolutions of the 1960s were prepared in the late 1950s. And you were a part of this moment.*

GU Well, at the time, it was as if it fell from the sky. Between 1962 and 1966 I had several exhibitions in New York, and also lived there for two years. This moment of witnessing world affairs, this traumatic experience of a self-destructing world, of harm done to people by people, has been a basic theme for me to this day. That man embodies good on the one hand and evil on the other, that he is capable of any evil, even up to the point of self-destruction. And this trauma inside of me that there may be a death wish awakens an immensely intensive awareness of being. This leads to a manic feeling of being pushed somehow to express this from within. As if one could unify the entire universe by oneself.

HUO *This is what you had said in an interview when you spoke of a large cosmic space, which can only be structured with difficulty. This was already evident in your earlier work, was it not?*

GU Yes, it was. There is an early work called *Sand Mill* that deals with earth art. There are also other early works like *String Chair*, which is currently in a museum in Mecklenburg, and *Fire Painting* as well as *New York Dancer I*.

HUO *Can you tell me more about* Sand Mill*?*

GU The idea is that strings slide in the sand surface and leave trails, which are then erased through new trails. For me it is the hostage of mortality and the hostage of time. The same thing always happens at the same place, but it gets erased at the same time.

HUO The String Chair *entails an ordinary wooden chair. And since the beginning, you've worked with nailed objects, like* Chair II *or* Nailed-over Table. *They aren't readymades. Are they altered readymades? What is your connection to readymade art and appropriation and your relation to Duchamp?*

GU I think of that more as utensils. Just about everything we find can be used as a piece of equipment with which to poke around in the world of perception. And just like a plow or a harrow is used as a torture device for the earth in order to bear fruit, I can view all objects as riotous, like chairs that are thrown in a bar fight. So that these objects can lead to new constellations of an explosive context. And that is the power of expression.

HUO *What about* New York Dancer I*? It looks like a kinetic sculpture with nails.*

GU Yes, it is a sack that is slid over a phallic construction which houses a large motor that sort of spins the entire sack, so that the nails embedded in the sack penetrate it. It is a 'furiosum,' as Fontana would say.

HUO *That was in relation to Fontana?*

GU Yes, that is the cosmic vision. The central piece is *Five Light Disks, Cosmic Vision*. It consists of five individually rotating wheels with light coming in from the side and which are structured when in motion; they all turn at different speeds and create an individual, cosmic vision, so to speak.

HUO *One can say this was part of the Neo-avant-garde of the 1960s. The connection between the Neo-avant-garde and the avant-garde of the early 20th century would be extremely interesting. Especially, when one sees such a piece, one thinks of the kinetic sculptures of Duchamp, Moholy-Nagy, or Naum Gabo. As part of the Neo-avant-garde, what was your relationship to the historical avant-garde?*

GU It was actually a discovery, given that we had no teachers. Most of the teachers were Nazis, except those who returned as immigrants to the GDR, where I was raised. These teachers were the first to expose us to the cultural events of the awakening spirit of the early 20th century. This gave us a feeling of being alive and it was something akin to a renaissance of the 20th century itself, which went through a disaster of self-destruction and cultural extermination of anything, which they perceived as abnormal. It was, one could say, a discovery of artistic possibilities of creatively expressing the deepest existential emotion. We found ourselves surrounded by the silence of the elders, who were on the one hand murderers and on the other hand fraudulently trying to create a new identity for themselves. We were lonely as young people, I especially. We felt the need to encounter the immigrants, who carried within themselves the memory of the awakening of the 20th century. They were the key figures that I met in England and New York, starting with Sandberg in Antwerp and Amsterdam. This need was what drove me to go somewhere else and learn about my own cultural conditioning, which I had only just rediscovered.

HUO *You said something interesting before about loneliness and the necessity of finding a dialogue with others, which lead you to ZERO. Because it was then that you suddenly came together with other artists. I think it will be interesting to revisit ZERO at this moment. I read the manifesto again yesterday and it said that ZERO is silence, it is the beginning, it is round, it rotates, the moon, the sun is white, etc.*

GU Yes. It was Piene's idea to incorporate the 'ideals' of his philosophical teaching, something that I vehemently rejected and that is why I distanced myself from them. It is also the reason why ZERO disbanded in 1966. We were suddenly affixed to an ideology.

HUO *So, how did ZERO come to be?*

GU I was ambitious after I came out of GDR, but I felt more lonely and isolated in West Germany. So I hitchhiked to Côte d'Azur because I wanted to see Picasso and Léger in Vallauris. I had the most important experiences there, in 1954, 1955 and 1958, long before ZERO. This is also where I met Arman and through Arman, Yves Klein. This was 1956, I revered Picasso's extensive work in his ceramics studio. I also adored all the resistance fighters who lived in these towns. Léger in Biot and Cocteau with his films created this atmosphere. But I didn't belong to it; I was, so to speak, just a voyeur. I realized that every generation had its own identity. And for that reason my relationship with Martial Raysse, Arman and Yves Klein were very significant. It was where I belonged. Then, in 1958, when I was in Düsseldorf and showing my work, Mack invited me to a ZERO exhibition at his and Piene's studios. Mathieu and Yves Klein were there too, and that is how I got roped into it. Piero Manzoni too always travelled between Paris, Antwerp, Düsseldorf and Copenhagen. We always had this mutual fascination for 'what is the other one doing there?'

HUO *What interests me is that whenever one reads about ZERO, there is this idea of a new beginning, the idea of a tabula rasa. Could you comment about that?*

GU Galerie Schmela had invited me to the Manifesto in 1961. I painted the street in front of the house white to illustrate that there is a white zone, which can provide the basis for true artistic expression. I did not belong to the generation of the guilty, but to the generation of the heirs of guilt. And accepting this inheritance led to the necessity of establishing other principles in order to express one's truthfulness to the world, in this case artistically. I painted the street white with wet paint and when people walked through it they dragged the paint to the downtown. Beuys was so excited he kicked over the tub with the white paint and laughed. And that, to me was ZERO. Before that, there was a simultaneity of similar artistic approaches, almost as if it was telepathic communication, like in the exhibition 'Vision in Motion - Motion in Vision' in the Hessenhuis in Antwerp 1959. Yves Klein blew smoke into the air and Tinguely even started a fight; the tension was high, because this was where all of these works of art came together.

HUO *And then in 1960 there was the exhibition 'Monochrome Painting' at the Museum Schloss Morsbroich in Leverkusen. Was it important for you?*

tille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist

GU Yes, very much so. Udo Kultermann, who had just become the director of the museum, came from Bremen. I think that there are a lot of relations between 'Monochrome Painting' and the exhibition 'Concrete Art 2', which Max Bill organized also in 1960 at the Helmhaus in Zurich. When Max Bill brought his own paintings to Leverkusen, he visited my studio to select some of my works for 'Concrete Art 2'. I must say that he was also a mentor for me. It was like a big network over Middle Europe. Then, Adorno opened the exhibition in Leverkusen. We expected him to talk about the works at the opening. But Adorno totally ignored it and made his own conceptual contribution in his speech. Back then I thought he would find some words about this pictorial phenomenology. Maybe for him it was an unusual encounter as well. But 'Monochrome Painting' was very close to 'Concrete Art'. The first exhibition of 'Concrete Art' had been in Basel 1944, and it was intended as a succession of the Bauhaus. The academies in Ulm and Donaueschingen also played a role, of course, with their musical accomplishments back then performed by Pierre Boulez, Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage, and LaMonte Young. This all began in the mid 1950s when Nam June Paik, who studied composition with Wolfgang Fortner at that time, came to Düsseldorf because there was a Dada exhibition in 1958. These things created the atmosphere. And when Twombly exhibited his drawings in Wilhelm in 1960, which I think were done with feces on paper, it was unbelievably moving; it was about the ability to give oneself visual expression that is not oriented towards history.

HUO *What is fascinating is that what you are describing leads to the question of the Gesamtkunstwerk, a synthesis of all the arts. It doesn't seem to depend on isolated objects but rather on the overarching idea of art.*

GU Yes, and it must come naturally, those are all unstoppable processes – like one's beard growing every day. These events weren't strategically manipulated. We said, of course, we stand for everything and we are the traveling ZERO circus and we show work everywhere, even in the bathroom, it does not matter. There is no taboo place where art can't be displayed. This made us so free, that we could show work everywhere, and we acknowledged art as a spatial, expansive power. But this was more the result of the impossibility to exhibit in a museum or in a gallery. There were only three galleries in Germany at the time anyway.

HUO *But there was this idea for the ensemble, for example with the* Five Light Disks, Cosmic Vision. *The idea, after all, was to create whole interiors.*

GU I've made things like this outside as well. We are picking out exhibition pieces right now which are on the one hand transportable, but on the other hand which are set up in close relation to the actual architecture of the exhibition space. Sometimes they should be transportable but they should also be in close relation with the surrounding space. Like farm tools. I am greatly influenced by agriculture; the sculptures have to be seen as farm tools which cultivate the cultural field. It is like the work of Strzeminski: drawing straight lines and plowing and picking, like I did as a child. That's how I translated the field structures into the art world. I call many works 'fields,' from an association with farming.

HUO *That leads to several projects, perhaps utopian projects that also deal with 'land art'.*

GU Matricide of Earth was a topic of mine for a long time. I was able to express this with 'Black Mesa' in America, in South Dakota. The US Government had acquired the Sacred Mountain there from the Indians to mine for uranium. For the Indians the mountain was a symbol of the omnipotence of gods, and the atomic energy is an attempt to master the forces of nature by science. But this can also lead to fatal destruction. It was about the vision of man, that anything he thinks is realizable.

HUO *The project could also be described as a theater of light. And the 'Traveling Theater' project was also from the 1960s. Could you tell us something about that too?*

GU I imagined creating a place where man could realize his longings without

having to leave. It was a giant spinning disk that was moved by people, like slaves drudging around in the trench, pushing the disks. And on the disk was a group of longing beings, in other words the protagonists. The protagonists on the disk were a group of people onto whom outside images from travel brochures were projected. We had wonderful photos from all around the world of palm trees, of the ocean and lots of mountains. The longing would be projected on a central disk and the shadows of the participants were cast on the large white walls surrounding the disk. Man exists as a shadow in this visionary reality, of not being there, but still being there, in this sort of garbage of longings.

HUO *Another project that fascinates me is when you lived with Gerhard Richter in the Kunsthalle in Baden-Baden in 1968. The idea was that museums can be inhabitable places, and the distinctions between art and life are blurred.*

GU: Klaus Gallwitz, who was head of the art museum at the time, had invited me to participate in a new program of 14 exhibitions, in which 14 artists made 14 exhibitions consecutively. So I said that, as the first one, I would prefer to bring in somebody else. And then Gerhard Richter and I created the manifesto 'art museums could be inhabitable spaces;' the culture is inhabitable, not unviewable, but inhabitable. And so we didn't make works, although others did. I brought my 'terror orchestra' and exhibited and performed it, and Richter continued to thickly paint his 'vision of the Alps.' We had our bedroom and the means to eat and cook and we lived at the art museum during that time. There were consoles that ran along the walls. Richter hung his snow landscapes above them, then took 'aerial flights' over the Alps with the help of a balloon and kept jumping down from the console into the hall and repeated this the entire day. All this happened during the museum's normal hours, and many of the visitors asked for a refund, because they thought the exhibition was still under construction. (*laughs*). It was a sort of a Happening, just an attempt to transfer the everyday life of an artist into a museum space. So that how art was made, and how it was exhibited, became recognized as the theme of the exhibition for the visitor.

HUO *Did you also have solo shows in New York?*

GU Yes, I did. Another series of works that has been very important for me during this period have been the 'Arrow pictures', where the underlying thought was that an artistic work is so strongly influenced by action and by correction, that it is always possible to intervene, so that one can still influence, through corrections, through going back and forth, the implementation of the will towards an artistic goal. So, in the house, where I had my workspace in Oberkassel, I painted the windows white and hung white boards and shot with white wooden arrows at these boards. I had the illusion that if I were to do this consistently and over an extended period of time, then I would recognize certain signs or symbols becoming apparent because they would repeat themselves. And because certain constellations would repeat themselves, influenced by the ballistics or my right-handedness, a sign would suddenly present itself, one which deals profoundly with the genetic structure of man. In the beginning, there were words, and the ability of abstraction, that lead to the language in our spiritual history. This leads to our ability to form an analogy to creation in which man can experience himself, world structures within himself, known to us today as micro structures and genetic structures. We discover the universe *within* more and more. This finds an expression through our actions and then becomes viewable. One recognizes something from within, through external activity, like the impact of the arrow into the work as an expression from within. That was the basis for the nailings later.

HUO *So, one can say that the arrow pictures anticipate the nailings?*

GU: They were parallel. That was in 1961. There were already nails before that. But here it was transferred to the spatial distance. It was interesting that it was no longer touchable, that I couldn't correct or change anything.

HUO *Your exhibition in New York is a solo exhibition. But in your work as a whole, collaboration has played a large role. I mean, there is the story of ZERO, which is just one of many collaborations. There are so many other collaborations – with*

Gerhard Richter, with Klaus Staeck, etc. You also released a book with Christa Wolf. This is something I find especially interesting, since we live in a time when the bridge to literature often falls short. In the avant-garde of the late 19th and early 20th century, the bridge to literature played a large role. And you always kept it going. What was the book that you and Christa Wolf worked on together?

GU The book goes back to the work that I did after Chernobyl. I did an entire ash series after Chernobyl: 'Can fertility be founded on ashes?' This ash series drew the attention of a publishing house in Leipzig. And Christa Wolf wrote *Störfall* (Accident) right after the catastrophic incident in Chernobyl. So the publisher said, 'We could put this together as a book.' So the book came out and we presented it in Neuhardenberg. Another collaboration was with Jürgen Habermas and with all of the really difficult texts that he published in the 1960s, which we picked out together. And then in St. Gallen, in the courtyard of the Erker Galerie, we hung them on large canvases measuring three meters tall- like people who hang their laundry outside, but with these important texts, so that just the cognition of the content became a different experience.

HUO *Is it true that you have made more than 300 books?*

GU They're not books in the sense of just a normal book, but there are certain circumstances surrounding them. For example, with Leaman in London, we made a book called *Who Throws the First Stone?* I have this idea, to take a stone and throw it at people or throw it through windows. Inside of a box are various pages in serigraphy, and the box is covered with sand, and on top of that lays the stone. So actually it is about the internal consequence of 'who throws the first stone.' It's a condescending attitude against men, but also a rebellion. Then there is the '*Black Room White Room*', a happening in which I paint a black room completely white. There is a film of it that Klaus Biesenbach presented at his MoMA Stories.

HUO *It's very interesting that your work encompasses all mediums. There are drawings, sculptures, installations, the books, and about 45 films.*

GU I've been working every day for over 50 years. Even on New Year's Eve I worked until five in the morning and was working again the next day.

HUO *There is also quite a lot of photography.*

GU I am working on a very interesting topic but it is not yet finished as a book. A clearing, as Heidegger described it, is where a tree falls in the forest and light falls in. And what do I discover there? Not only the fallen tree but also a murder. And so a murder has been committed against nature in the form of a clearing. Now I have these photos from the criminal justice department in Basel. I smuggled them out. The murder cases are real; terrible photos. All of them reworked, changed so that no one recognizes anything. It's quite a thick book, and it is, in the end, necrophilia as a sort of mummification. In other circumstances it would have been tossed into the oven. But with the help of artistic action, I turn it into a sculpture and am able to preserve the forest.

HUO *What part do the films play in your work?*

GU They are more autobiographical repressions. Otherwise they would flow into my work. And so I consider this the release, the runoff or drain in the bathtub or toilet, where one can let it go. I let go of the autobiographical sentimentality with the help of films.

HUO *Then what are the watercolors?*

GU They are the notations of the deepest sentimental engagement with everything that I find alienating.

HUO *And what is the role of drawing, you draw a great deal; all over in your studio are sketches. Is drawing an everyday practice?*

GU It is. It's something like scraping and scratching. Like when I spoke of slipping in one's own vomit. It leaves behind wonderful traces of impact (*laughs*).

HUO *Can you say something about your role as an inventor and the idea of invention?*

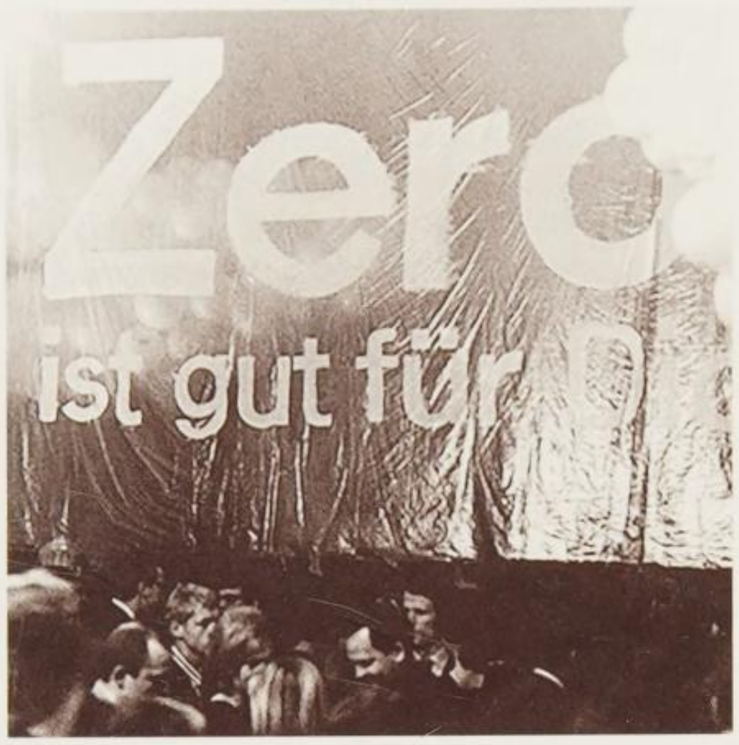
GU It was 1968 and I thought invention that leads to incredible works means everything. The main idea was that the artwork itself could be thrown away the moment in which the invention that lead to the work is absorbed and understood in the brain. One invents a work of art, but the thought that leads to an artwork is of epistemic value for the process of the brain; and the object can be thrown away. It is the shadow of the presence.

HUO *One very last question. Rainer Maria Rilke wrote a book of advice for young poets. What would your advice be for a young artist in 2011?*

GU Not to take everything one has learned as the complete groundwork for artistic or written expression, but instead to orientate oneself towards the mistakes that are made repeatedly and that one tries to keep hidden. Often it is only a disguise, a travesty of mistakes. It is most important to concentrate on that which doesn't need to be disguised, to expose oneself and to find an outlet for mistakes and for life's existence.

(Abridged and edited version)

o dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer, Wasser, Meer. Rot orange



ZERO today

history doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme

interview with daniel birnbaum*

mattijs visser

Mattijs Visser *When I started with the ZERO Foundation, I was often asked, not only by museum people and politicians, but also by artists, whether ZERO really had any relevance for today. This was followed by the question of which artists could be seen as ZERO artists, and if ZERO was a German group or an international movement.*

Here is an anecdote that I think is interesting. Mark Rothko came to Otto Piene's opening at the Howard Wise Gallery in New York and told Piene, 'I could have also been a ZERO artist.' Piene explained to me that Rothko was trying to paint pure light using paint, and discovered only at the opening that one could also paint with the very essence of light. So is Mark Rothko a ZERO artist?

Daniel, you have been president of the Academic Board of Advisors since the establishment of the ZERO foundation. Maybe you can answer the question of what the relevance of ZERO is today, and not only from a given historical perspective.

Daniel Birnbaum As to the question of an art movement's relevance today, with emphasis on 'today,' we shouldn't only consider whether its works are found in important collections, or how much they sell for, but we should ask what ZERO means for new generations of artists. Do we find traces of its work in what happened afterwards? Is it influential in that sense?

The whole idea of influence is complex, and many art critics and literary scholars have examined it. Harold Bloom's book, *Anxiety of Influence*, tries to come to terms with poetic influence. Not only does 'A' lead to 'B' – a linear understanding of influence in which something that happened long ago was necessary for something happening today. There is also an inverted mechanism: what happens today is also important for our understanding of what went before. What does this imply? In what way do today's developments influence our perception of former periods?

For example, I would say that that Marcel Duchamp was one of the most influential artists of this time, leading to conceptual approaches in art and a critique of traditional notions of the artwork. But contemporary artistic production also influences our perception of Duchamp's work: what happened after Duchamp keeps his legacy alive. After Andy Warhol, Jeff Koons, etc., Duchamp appears in a different light. From the emergence of Pop Art on, Duchamp is not quite the same anymore. Our understanding of what it is to put a mass-produced commodity on display has perhaps been normalized through Pop, but this also shifts our perception of Duchamp. The essential question is: Which contemporary figures are of relevance for our understanding of ZERO today? On the other hand, it would be interesting to identify artists from before the emergence of ZERO who

* Daniel Birnbaum is a curator, writer and Director of Moderna Museet, Stockholm.

were brought back into the conversation through ZERO.

MV *The difficulty in talking with younger artists, and with artists that came directly after the ZERO generation is that few of them would acknowledge being influenced by ZERO. Olafur Eliasson says that ZERO's influence on his work is minimal. James Turrell may not acknowledge having seen an Yves Klein show in New York. But below the level of conscious influence, previous artists certainly exert an unconscious impact on later art practices.*

DB Olafur is someone I know well. He is an artist who does a lot of reading and research. Many of the things he has dealt with are present but not always immediately visible in his work. I am not claiming that there are 'secret sources' he avoids mentioning, but I think there is always a certain degree of *zeitgeist* you can't escape. Certain things happened when ZERO emerged in the late 1950s, early '60s. One can observe recurring themes. I think it was Mark Twain who said that 'History doesn't repeat itself, but it does rhyme.' Which is true, considering the 1960s, with all the experimentation in art, the notions of collaboration, and interdisciplinary work between theatre, art, and music, the advances in technology, as well as experimentation with new forms of communication.

These things have happened before; for example, in the 1920s, think of collaborations between Sergei Diaghilev, Igor Stravinsky, and Pablo Picasso. It was not the same as in the '60s, but there was a profusion of new ideas –with Duchamp and the Futurists in the background. You can find moments that seem to be connected. One can never prove that there is an inspirational link between the 1920s and the 1960s, but certain ideas that were formulated, let's say in Paris, re-emerged in a totally new environment.

To come back to the relationship between ZERO and today's artists: in the early 1990s, there were ideas of collaboration and collective production, and an interest in the link between art and architecture, as well as other disciplines, in the work of artists that have often been called relational. One can link those practices to the experimental approach ZERO stands for. An example of this is the installation room that Mack, Piene, and Uecker created for documenta III in 1964.

In this legendary *Light Room (Homage to Fontana)*, which is today part of the collection of Museum Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf, and is the highlight of the ZERO exhibitions in New York, Berlin, and Amsterdam, there are things that I think Olafur and his generation appreciate. By that, I don't mean to say that that *Light Room* 'led' in any way to works Olafur Eliasson has made. But they have a lot in common.

To complicate things, let's turn the tables. *The Light Room* was legendary, and many scholars knew all about it. Some people saw this work as very interesting and intriguing –but for years, not many people paid attention to it. Then, suddenly, there emerged artists like Carsten Höller or Olafur Eliasson. They stand for a certain approach, which is not the same as that of ZERO, but there is nevertheless a similarity in their art, with a general interest in collaboration that establishes links to other disciplines.

So I think that, through contemporary artists, the *Light Room*, which could have fallen into oblivion, is suddenly more 'present' than it used to be. In my eyes, this idea of retroactive activation of a work can be very inspirational. It's hard to find a scientific model for this idea of *nachträglich* (a Freudian term), or retroactive production of meaning. But I think it is something that happens all the time. Looking at the ZERO artists through the lens of some of our contemporary practitioners today is important.

MV *I am wondering how it is possible that certain forms or concepts repeat themselves without direct contact with the first instance of their invention, if it can be called 'invention'. Kazimir Malevich, creator of the* Black Square, *also conceived a magazine called* ZERO *to publish articles on nothingness and beyond. Fritz Lang, the filmmaker, invented the countdown for a spaceship launch in his 1929 movie,* Woman in the Moon. *Kazuo Shiraga founded the Zero-kai artist*

group in Japan to assert that art should develop by itself out of nothingness, without any reference to history. Heinz Mack and Otto Piene were completely unaware of this when they 'invented' ZERO in 1957.

So how is it possible that a Russian artist, a group in Japan, and the two Germans all came up with similar ideas, almost simultaneously, without being aware of each other? Or is this zeitgeist? Maybe zeitgeist can travel not only in time, but also geographically?

DB I would say that there are certain links that are hard to explain, certain forms of synchronicity, or zeitgeist-related things that maybe relate. Sometimes technological or theoretical innovations create new possibilities, and we find that people in different parts of the world relate to these with seemingly synchronized artistic expressions, although they are not aware of each other.

What I am trying to say has nothing to do with whether influences are conscious or not. Another example is how, when Piene created his first *Light Ballet* in 1959, some critics were quick to point out that similar things had been done before. Piene himself wrote in his manifesto, 'Paths to Paradise,' in *ZERO 3*: 'I only heard later that I was the son of a half dozen fathers whom I did not know as such.' What does he mean by 'fathers'? He didn't even know them. It is almost like you give birth to your own parents.

You asked in what sense an influence could exert itself retroactively. The physical objects are there; they don't change. So, obviously, no one who creates art today can change the physical substrata of an art piece. We are not changing the collections in museums or in the secret archives anywhere. What changes is the understanding of these works. Art is not only a material medium, but is also produced by the audience and by its context, by its continuous reading by generations of artists. Therefore, the significance and ultimately the meaning of artworks do change over time. And not only because we dig deeper and deeper into what they once meant.

MV *So we are contemporary archaeologists of a sort. We dig up certain historical elements or happenings, and bring them forth. How do we decide which ones? You work with emerging artists: What inspires you while digging through history? And how do you decide whether it makes sense to reactivate these archaeological finds?*

DB What does one look for? When does it feel 'fresh' or relevant? It is something that you have to feel, and then you can try to formulate ideas. What is it that makes something relevant today? I think it has to do with intuition. It is not something you can prove. You can spell out relevant themes the ZERO artists shared, but when you try to understand it, you find recurring things. The interests are still there, or they have renewed relevance.

The approach to art that ZERO represents has an interest in the phenomenology of embodiment, in the fact that a viewer is there. The viewer becomes part of the artwork in the sense that the artwork is almost behind your eyes rather than in front of your eyes. That is actually a James Turrell quote: 'Art itself is not the technological setup, the machinery necessary to produce a certain experience; it is the experience itself.' This is something that has to be recreated over and over again, because it actually takes place in the here and now with an individual, singular subject. So one can return to the same old artwork, but it is also relevant that new human beings, who are embodied selves, actually encounter things anew. Perhaps the limit that some of these radical artists are looking for is similar: the void or the limit where language can no longer signify, or the kind of objectless space where we have reached beyond all empirical perception. We only perceive perception itself.

We can find words to describe a certain kind of border, but I think it is not surprising that artists return to the same, or almost the same, ambition, only in a different form, because we are in constantly new technological political environments. You asked me about the strong moments where I felt "This is great; this is fifty years old, but it could have been done yesterday." It doesn't matter when it was made; it is of relevance for us now.

MV *We restaged Otto Piene's multimedia performance,* The Proliferation of the Sun, *from the mid-1960s, first in Düsseldorf, then in Stockholm, and recently in Berlin, and I know that we both shared the 'feeling' that this 'archaeological treasure' is relevant for our time. What does that mean?*

DB Let's imagine contemporary artists as a kind of prism through which we look at things that happened before. They look at the past and they emerge changed somehow. There is a kind of obsession with the sun as a heavenly body, the source of light –at least our cosmic source of light. I found this obsession in many artists: in Spencer Finch, in Olafur Eliasson for example. A kind of heliophilic drive, an almost obsessive, recurring interest in the sun as a source, and the sun as a metamorphic body, as the center of cosmology, and as the strongest lamp around, one that can take many shapes. Gustav Theodor Fechner, an early psychologist who stared into the sun until he turned blind, fascinated Finch. Olafur is the producer and manufacturer of enormous suns. The most famous one was *The Weather Project* at the Tate Modern in London in 2003. But it is almost like there is a heliophilic drive in everything he has done. Suddenly seeing *The Proliferation of the Sun* by Otto Piene again, which uses such beautiful old technology that seemed almost obsolete with its slide projectors, but so visually appealing, was one of those moments when I felt: That work could go into any show with contemporary artists who work with similar themes today. It doesn't feel like some old archival piece; it would fit into a young artists' show.

MV *Is art a machine for producing experiences for the public? Thinking about Otto Piene, it is fantastic to see people coming out of an exhibition or event, and to know they have had a different experience, a different feeling. Does art only produce feelings or experiences?*

DB That is not such a small thing. If art actually produces emotions and feelings, I think it's something to take seriously. I, for one, think it does. Art has to do with shifts in emotions. But I think this also happens through very intellectual means. I would say that one of the things that makes ZERO attractive for many artists today is the interdisciplinary nature of their work, their interest in technology and scientific research, the things they shared early on. Otto Piene stood for this in his entire life. For many years, he was not very visible as an artist. He was a teacher and researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and he saw his work as a kind of open-ended research project. Of course, there were results; there were artworks being produced, but it was also the beauty of the path –the beauty of the research. That kind of non-commercial, non-art-market-oriented approach which also challenges the structure of the art world with its institutions, gallery system, is something that fascinates many people, myself among them. I think the link to science and research makes the art of the ZERO group special, and keeps coming back as one of the reasons why the group is still attractive to many people working today.

There is also their philosophical approach. It is not really a given what an artwork is. It is something that has to be explored. I think, deep down, the ZERO movement stands for an exploration of perception, experience, and what art can be –even a kind of open exploration of what the role of an artwork can be. That has to do with the limits of perception, the boundaries of what is in our minds and psychological make-up, in our biologically given perceptual apparatus, and what is then added and changes technologically. There are previous moments in advanced aesthetics and writing about art that have tested these limits before, like Walter Benjamin's 1930s study, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. They have to do with the idea that technology doesn't merely add something to our perception; it shifts our perception. It can even reorganize our perceptual apparatus.

This can be found in later philosophers as well. For example Gilles Deleuze is interested in what is to become a subject. It is not something that is determined once and for all, but rather is molded through subjectivization, in relationship to language, socialization, and technology.

I think that, if one explores the ZERO artists, one can find such ideas in their writings and their projects. They are interested in the boundary between nature and technology being redrawn in new ways; it is not simply a given.

MV *You mentioned ZERO as a laboratory in which many groups of artists participated with their own laboratories. Do you see any artists today who are able to include other artists in the same way? Do they include the outside world in their research, in their experiments?*

DB It is sometimes more a rhetorical figure than a real fact. But I think that the artists we are talking about, because they are obviously of relevance for today's exploration of art, space, and technology –people like Olafur Eliasson and Carsten Höller- do indeed do what you describe. Olafur's studio is a laboratory. These artists produce big machineries for exhibitions, but they also experiment quietly, in an open-ended way with architects and scientists. Olafur was a professor for a while, so he was able to bring into his studio a number of interesting guests: thinkers, writers, philosophers, sociologists, and emerging artists. The studio was part of a big, Berlin-based, laboratory-style exploration of what art can be in society, and what art can be in relationship to audiences and to other disciplines.

There are examples of collaboration today; for example Carsten Höller often refers to his work explicitly as a kind of laboratory. He talks about a 'laboratory of doubt.' He has done many works about the extreme limits of perception. For example: How can we shift our perception if we wear glasses that turn things upside down? Our brain tries to process what we see, and in the end it all looks all right. Then you take off the glasses and you are confused. That is just one example. But he has done many things about destabilization.

MV *But the whole idea of turning everything upside down has been studied before, so what is so experimental about it? Or is the experiment about sharing the moment of discovery with a wider public?*

DB There are some experiments that very few people know about, and he is testing them –maybe pushing their boundaries with a different goal in mind. But he does have a scientific background. He is one of the few contemporary artists who read advanced scientific books, because that's part of his education and background. You might say that he brings this knowledge into another public sphere –a way to look at his experiments that is not uninteresting. What does it mean to recreate extreme scientific experiments in an opera house, as he did once, or in front of a big audience who normally has little to do with such things? Of course, Gestalt psychology and cognitive science have done similar experiments in a very specialized scientific community. But I think Carsten is trying things in a relatively open-ended and interesting way.

MV *Talking about crossing borders, or pushing boundaries, Heinz Mack developed projects for the Sahara in the late '50s, and Otto Piene designed sculptures for the sky. Yves Klein designed a space rocket, Piero Manzoni placed our world on a plinth. Several of these ZERO artists tried to challenge spaces outside of museums. To what extent do you think they succeeded in landing there, in this so-called other world? Nowadays, we live in this very commercial world, and everything has to be materialized. Do you think it is still important to carry on with this challenge to find other routes outside the White Cube, the museum, and the market structure?*

DB: I think it has become a bit of a predictable expectation, or even something that can almost be reduced to a slogan, to think that art that criticizes institutions like the White Cube as a standard space is automatically of interest. But I do think that there is a big outside world waiting for us. It can take different shapes. I am not sure that the ZERO artists were so successful at this, as not many people realize what they did when they brought the desert and the outer space into their work. We can always find predecessors for their work, but it was brave and new for them at the time. I think they invented it, or at least they had the sense that they were breaking new ground.

MV *Do artists perhaps need scientists more than scientists need artists? When you ask scientists, they are not really interested in artists; it's the other way around. What is it that artists look for in science?*

DB: It is something that brings them outside a cliché understanding of the artist as something already formulated fully –something that may open up new possibilities for the role of the artist. There are many versions of this, of art looking for interdisciplinary connections to enrich the idea of what art and an artist can be. Do scientists need artists? Maybe not for science *per se*, to be successful as scientists. I think that scientists as human beings do need art –but that is a totally different question. On the other hand, some great thinkers with scientific ambitions are interested in innovation as something that is not limited to technology or small adjustments inside scientific theories, but that involves profound shifts in understanding who we are.

A younger artist we have not spoken about yet is Thomás Saraceno, who was educated as an architect but was not very successful in that field. Now he has turned out to be a very thought-provoking installation artist using natural science in his work. I am not even sure I should say science: if you want to know about nature, you usually study what scientists have found out about nature. It might be spider webs, or it might be new materials. It might be things that have changed our perception of what it is to be part of nature, what nature ultimately is, and what form and shape it takes. If you see a tree as architecture, it is a very sophisticated piece of architecture, and you might start thinking about everyday things in a slightly different way. One could say that Thomás turns certain scientific explorations and findings into artistically interesting situations.

We've spoken about several different artists, but we have yet to mention any women. At the Venice Biennale in 2009, I opened the show at the Arsenale with a remarkably strong female artist from Brazil, Lygia Pape, who was from the generation of ZERO artists. It seems to me that the ZERO movement was an all male European group of artists.

MV *Oh no, not at all. Of course there were female artists in the international ZERO network from the very beginning, in the 1960s, some of them very active. I think, especially after World War II, if they were not married and didn't have to take care of a family, women really had a chance to start a career as artists. And as Otto has told us, ZERO was not a group with a membership; ZERO had no president. ZERO was a vision, and open to like-minded artists. No one was to be excluded.*

We recently discovered that Hal Busse is still alive; she participated in one of the earliest ZERO shows, in Otto Piene's studio. At the time, she was making red monochrome paintings with thousands of dots, and Uecker-like paintings with nails –not white, in different colors. Her work is very closely related to the obsessive Infinity Nets *by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. A few years later, Busse married the artist Klaus Bendixen and had to take care of the family. In Italy, the architect Nanda Vigo played a very important role for the ZERO network. She invited Lucio Fontana and Enrico Castellani to do installations in the houses she designed. But she also did independent artwork for the ZERO shows. Eduarda Maino (whose artist name was Dadamaino) was from the outset active in the Italian Azimuth group. Yayoi Kusama participated in almost all ZERO show from 1961 onwards. She did her first mirror installations after participating in an early ZERO show in Amsterdam. Lygia Pape could have been a ZERO artist, but decided after a near-fatal accident in Germany not to come back to Europe. Atsuko Tanaka, one of the founders of the Japanese Zero-kai group created (her* Electric Dress *is an icon) a very female expression that is at the same time highly technical.*

Other female artists were around at the time who were pursuing slightly different agendas but were closely connected with ZERO artists: Yves Klein's wife, Rotraut Uecker, and Niki de Saint Phalle, who was married to Jean Tinguely. And not to forget Hanne Darboven, a student of Almir Mavignier, whose early work displayed a number of parallels with that of the ZERO artists. Mary Baumeister, at the time married to Karlheinz Stockhausen,

organized in her studio meetings with and for [ZERO] artists. That some of them did not play a role within the ZERO network does not mean that they are not important for us today. I am sure we will be able to find more female artists with an exciting history in the 1960s. Atsuko Tanaka was one of the completely forgotten until I included her in a ZERO show in 2006. Her husband, a conceptual artist from the Gutai group, stopped working so she could concentrate on her career.

DB Let me come back to the beginning of our conversation, to the question of why I think ZERO is so attractive again today –beyond the kind of theoretical, philosophical attempts of mine here to talk about retroactive animation and things like that. I simply think that their work is really interesting to most people who think about art, look at art, and want to experience art. And I'm not talking only about people involved in producing, selling, and collecting, but also those trying to understand how the history of our life on Earth has developed. There are many alternative histories. ZERO is now becoming a more widely known story, or part of a well-known narrative. It is my attempt and my wish, when involved in conversations like this, not to solidify and canonize a certain group of artists, but to remind ourselves of the fact that there are alternative stories. And the story of art is far richer than that of real life. Plus, it rhymes.

Zero fliesst. Das Auge Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die Blume Zero der V



nweigend. Schwebend. Ich esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache Zero, ic

works on display

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, 1957-58
Spatial Concept
Incisions on paper
97 x 130 cm
Private Collection, London

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, 1958
Spatial Concept
Incisions on paper
96 x 130 cm
Ben Brown Fine Arts, London

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, Natura, 1959-60
Spatial Concept, Nature
Bronze
Ø 75 cm
Rira Collection

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, Natura, 1959-60
Spatial Concept, Nature
Bronze
Ø 66 cm
Rira Collection

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, Natura, 1959-60
Spatial Concept, Nature
Bronze
Ø 65 cm
Rira Collection

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, 1960
Spatial Concept
Oil and watercolor on canvas with holes
85 x 70 cm
Rira Collection

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, 1965
Spatial Concept
Perforated aluminum
95 x 70 cm
Adolf-Luther-Stiftung Collection, Krefeld

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, 1965
Spatial Concept
Perforated aluminum
86 x 63 cm
Adolf-Luther-Stiftung Collection, Krefeld

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, 1965
Spatial Concept
Perforated aluminum
86 x 63 cm
Adolf-Luther-Stiftung Collection, Krefeld

Lucio Fontana
Concetto Spaziale, 1969
Spatial Concept
Watercolor on canvas, incisions
144 x 101 cm
Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen

Yves Klein
Pure Pigment (PIG 1), re-creation of 1957 work
Dry, powdered ultramarine blue pigment
1220 x 270 cm
Private Collection

Yves Klein
California (IKB 69), 1961
Dry pigment and synthetic resin on gauze mounted on panel
194.5 x 140 cm
Private Collection

Heinz Mack
Weißer Rotor, 1958
White Rotor
Wood, corrugated glass, paper, electricity
172 x 102 x 36 cm
Studio Mack

Heinz Mack
Kein Anfang, Kein Ende, 1959
No Beginning, No End
Oil on canvas
310 x 110 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
Drei Lichtkuben, 1959
Three Lightcubes
Neon tubes, corrugated glass, wood, aluminum
61.5 x 43 x 43 cm;
71 x 52.5 x 53 cm;
86 x 68 x 68 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
Weiße Rotor mit Weißen Punkten, 1960
White Rotor with White Dots
Glass, plywood, pasteboard, motor
170 x 100 x 31 cm
Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art

Heinz Mack
Lichtgitter im Raum, 1961
Lightcurtain in Space
Chromed aluminum
180 x 3 cm (18 pieces)
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
ZERO-Kleid, 1961-2008
ZERO-Dress
Cotton
100 x 60 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
ZERO-Uhr, 1961-2008
ZERO-Clock
Electrical clock, collage
210 x 62 x 62 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
ZERO-Fahne, 1961-2008
ZERO-Flag
Textile
200 x 220 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
Stele mit 9 Linsen, 1962
Stele with Nine Lenses
Fresnel lens, plexiglass
254 x 30 x 10 cm
The Artist, Beck & Eggeling (Düsseldorf) and Sperone Westwater (New York)

Heinz Mack
Dynamische Struktur (Schwarz auf Weiß), 1962
Dynamic Structure (Black on White)
Synthetic resin on nettle cloth
130 x 120 cm
Studio Mack

ebe Zero. Zero ist schön, dynamo dynamo dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee,

Heinz Mack
Zick-Zack,1962
Zig-Zag
Plexiglass, aluminum
272 x 34 x 14.4 cm
Studio Mack

Heinz Mack
Dynamicshe Struktur (Weiss auf Schwarz), 1962
Dynamic Structure (White on Black)
Resin, pigment on canvas, strech frame
131 x 171 x 2.5 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf

Heinz Mack
Dynamicshe Struktur, 1962
Dynamic Structure
Synthetic resin on canvas
130 x 147 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Ute Mack

Heinz Mack
Sahara Projekt, 1962
Sahara Project
16 mm film transferred to video
ZERO Foundation Collection

Heinz Mack
Die Zeit der Sterne,1963
Timestars
Drum lens, plexiglas
227.5 x 43.5 x 70 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
Große Relief Stele, 1963
Large Relief Stele
Wood, aluminum, steel
402 x 48 x 80 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
Ohne Titel, 1964
Untitled
Plexiglass, aluminum
268 x 45 x 2.25 cm
Studio Mack

Heinz Mack
Door of Paradise, 1964
Aluminem panel on wooden plate, plexiglas, metal frame
203 x 103.6 x 10.2 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf

Heinz Mack
Lichtgitter im Raum, 1964
Lightcurtain in Space
Aluminum, plexiglass
200 x 300 x 4 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Heinz Mack

Heinz Mack
Ohne Titel, 1964 (replica)
Untitled
Glass, plexiglass
268 x 37 x 10 cm
Studio Mack

Heinz Mack
Bettina, 1965
Aluminum, wood, perspex, mirrors
241.5 x 32 x 2.25 cm
Studio Mack

Heinz Mack
Joy, 1965
Steel, chrome plated
265 x 18 x 6 cm
Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art

Heinz Mack
Rotor für Lichtgitter, 1967
Rotor for Lightcurtain
Aluminum, wood, plexiglass
150 x 150 x 38 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Ute Mack

Heinz Mack
Silber Stele für Venedig, 1967-69
Silver Stele for Venice
Aluminum, wood
422 x 31.5 x 2.5 cm
Studio Mack

Heinz Mack
Sahara Stele, 1968-2011
Aluminum, electronics
280 x 28 x 17 cm
The Artist, Beck & Eggeling (Düsseldorf) and Sperone Westwater (New York)

Heinz Mack
Karo Stele, 1968-81
Diamond Stele
Aluminum, wood, stainless steel
301 x 25 x 25 cm
The Artist, Beck & Eggeling (Düsseldorf) and Sperone Westwater (New York)

Heinz Mack
The Sky Over Nine Columns, 2012-2014
850.000 *tessarae* (mosaic stones, 24 ct. gold leaf) on a construction of composite and platform in steel
750 x 125 x 125 cm
Private Collection, Germany
Courtesy of Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art

Piero Manzoni
Achrome, 1958-59
Kaolin on canvas
100 x 70 cm
Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen

Piero Manzoni
Achrome, 1959
Kaolin on pieces of canvas on canvas
91 x 70 cm
Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen

Piero Manzoni
Achrome, 1959-62
Cotton wool on wood
92 x 73 x 12 cm
Private Collection

Piero Manzoni/Herman de Vries
Wit in Wit, 1962 – 2015
White in White
Paint with texture and lamps
240 x 240 x 240 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection

Otto Piene
Rasterbild ohne Titel, 1957
Untitled Raster Painting
Raster painting
80 x 100 cm
Helga and Edzard Reuter Collection, Stuttgart

Otto Piene
Rauchzeichnung, 1959
Smoke Painting
Smoke on board
70 x 100 cm
moresky.org Collection

Otto Piene
Ein Fest für das Licht, 1958
A Feast for the Light
Raster painting
177 x 177 x 6 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf

Otto Piene
Ohne Titel,1959
Untitled
Soot on paper
49.6 x 64.5 cm
Museum Morsbroich,
Leverkusen

Otto Piene
Ohne Titel,1959
Untitled
Soot on paper
49.6 x 64.5 cm
Museum Morsbroich,
Leverkusen

Otto Piene
Lichtströmung, 1959
Light Stream
Oil on canvas
68 x 96.5 cm
Ketterer Kunst, Munich

Otto Piene
Lichtgrafik Ohne Titel, 1960
Untitled Lightgraphic
Soot on paper
50.4 x 50.7 cm
Museum Morsbroich,
Leverkusen

Otto Piene
Rauchzeichnung III, 1960
Smoke Painting III
Oil and soot on canvas
80 x 100 cm
Helga and Edzard Reuter
Collection, Stuttgart

Otto Piene
Due Onde Nell'Oscurita, 1963
Two Waves in the Dark
Oil and soot on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Sammlung Schaub, Landshut

Otto Piene
Große Feuerblume, 1965
Large Fireflower
White paint, soot, partly
yellowish traces
119.5 x 170 x 5 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast,
Düsseldorf

Otto Piene
Electric Anaconda, 1965
Brass globes, flat black paint,
glow lamps
169 x 41 x 41 cm
Private Collection, Courtesy of
Sperone Westwater, New York

Otto Piene
Feuerblume, 1965
Fireflower
Oil, pigment and soot
on canvas
99.5 x 99.5 cm
Kunstmuseum Bonn

Otto Piene
Black Light Ballet Drum, 1967
Wood, metal, glass, motor,
electric light
50 x 150 cm
Private Collection
Courtesy of Sperone
Westwater, New York

Otto Piene
Inflatables – Purple Star, 2014
Fabric
Ø 430 cm, tube 1000 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Inflatables – Indigo Star, 2014
Fabric
Ø 430 cm, tube 800 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Inflatables – Green Star, 2014
Fabric
Ø 550 cm, tube 1000 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Inflatables – Blue Star, 2014
Fabric
Ø 500 cm, tube 800 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Inflatables – Red Star, 2014
Fabric
Ø 450 cm, tube 700 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Inflatables – Orange Star, 2014
Fabric
Ø 400 cm, tube 700 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Inflatables – Yellow Star, 2014
Fabric
Ø 600 cm, tube 700 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
La Luna en Rodage, 1961-67
The Moon Running
Oil and soot on canvas
150 x 150 cm
Museum Morsbroich,
Leverkusen

Otto Piene
Lichtscheibe, 1963-1986
Light Disc
Metal, wood, motor, lamps
196 x 54 x 40 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Pearl Flowers, 1965-74
(replica 2015)
Metal, wood, spring steel
240 x 40 x 40 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Lichtgeist, 1966- 2012
Light Ghost
Glass, light bulbs, metal base
and timer
H. 200 cm, Ø 60 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Lichtgeist, 1966-2012
Light Ghost
Glass, light bulbs, metal base
and timer
H. 200 cm, Ø 60 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Lichtgeist, 1966-2012
Light Ghost
Glass, light bulbs,
metal base and timer
H. 200 cm, Ø 60 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Lichtgeist, 1966-2014
Light Ghost
Glass, light bulbs, metal base
and timer
H. 200 cm, Ø 60 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Lichtkugel, 1971-72
Light Ball
Metal, motor, electric light,
hanging chain
Ø 50 cm
Private Collection
Courtesy of Sperone
Westwater, New York

ero. Gold und Silber, Schall und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero. Zero ist rund. Zero ist Zero. Ze

Otto Piene
Olympia Regenbogen, 1972-73
Olympia Rainbow
Photograph taken during the event by Erwin Fieger
Screenprint
130 x 200 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Sky Lei, 1972-73
Photograph taken during the event by Mira Cantor
Screenprint
130 x 200 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Boston Blau, 1972-73
Boston Blue
Photograph taken during the event by Mira Cantor
Screenprint
130 x 200 cm
Private Collection

Otto Piene
Lichtzylinder, 1975-1990
Light Cylinder
Cardboard, wood, motor, lamps
H. 205 cm, Ø 60 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Silberspirale II, 1957
Silver Spiral II
Silver bronze on canvas
116 x 101 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Struktur, 1958
Structure
Acrylic and papiermaché on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Sammlung Schaub, Landshut

Günther Uecker
Formationsauflösung, 1958
Dissolution of Formation
Cardboard tubes and synthetic resin on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Rira Collection

Günther Uecker
Symmetrische Struktur, 1959
Symmetrical Structure
Nails and plaster on canvas on wood, sprayed
130 x 80 x 13 cm
Museum Morsbroich, Leverkusen

Günther Uecker
Unvollendete Saule, 1959
Unfinished Pillar
Nails and graphite on canvas on cardboard, sprayed
70 x 16 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Korkenbild II, 1960
Cork-image II
Cork and synthetic resin on canvas
100 x 100 cm
Rira Collection

Günther Uecker
Objekt Weiß, 1961
White Object
Nails on canvas on wood, sprayed
100 x 100 cm
Viktor and Marianne Langen Collection, Neuss

Günther Uecker
Lichtglobus, 1961
Lightglobe
Nails on wood, sprayed
Ø 17 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (Nr.5),1961
Cosmic Vision / Lightdisk (No. 5)
Nails on canvas on wood, sprayed, electric motor, floodlight
225 x 175 x 38 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Nagelnachttisch, 1963
Nightstand
Nails and white paint on wood
60 x 50 x 50 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Wandtisch, 1963
Side Table
Nails on wood
60 x 50 x 50 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Nageltisch, 1964
Nailed Table
Nails on wooden table, sprayed
H. 72.5 cm, Ø 76 cm
Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf

Günther Uecker
New York Dancer I, 1965
Nail, sailcloth, metal, electric motor
200 x 100 x 100 cm
Private Collection, London

Günther Uecker
Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (Nr.1) , 1965
Cosmic Vision / Lightdisk (No. 1)
Nails on canvas on wood, sprayed, electric motor, floodlight
174 x 174 x 30 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Lichtregen, 1966-2006
Light Rain
Aluminum, neon lights
H. 250 cm, Ø 8 cm (46 pieces)
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Günther Uecker

Günther Uecker
Stuhl, 1967
Chair
Wood, canvas and painted nails
90 x 43 x 46 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
KubusKubus, 1967-1993-2009
CubusCubus
Wood, metal, nails
127 x 60 x 60 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Christine Uecker

Günther Uecker
Kosmische Vision / Schnelle Lichtscheibe (Nr.2), 1968
Cosmic Vision / Fast Light-disk (No. 2)
Nails on canvas on wood, sprayed, electric motor, floodlight
180 x 90 x 30 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Nageltisch, 1968-2014
Nailed Table
Wood, metal, nails
220 x 180 x 180 cm
ZERO Foundation Collection, donated by Günther Uecker

Günther Uecker
Ohne Titel, 1972
Untitled
Nails and pencil on canvas on wooden board
160.5 x 160.5 x 19 cm
Stadtsparkasse Düsseldorf Collection, Germany

Günther Uecker
Alles fließt, 1972
Everything Flows
Nails, wood, nettlecloth on wood
160 x 16 x 21 cm
Kunstmuseum Bonn

Günther Uecker
Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (Nr.3) , 1975
Cosmic Vision / Lightdisk (No. 3)
Nails on canvas on wood, sprayed, electric motor, floodlight
240 x 160 x 25 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Kosmische Vision / Lichtscheibe (Nr.4), 1981
Cosmic Vision / Lightdisk (No. 4)
Nails on canvas on wood, sprayed, electric motor, floodlight
240 x 120 x 18 cm
Private Collection

Günther Uecker
Schwarze Spirale, 1982
Black Spiral
Nails and pencil on canvas on wooden board
151 x 151 x 22 cm
Stadtsparkasse Düsseldorf Collection, Germany

FILM
Gerd Winkler
0 x 0= Kunst, Maler ohne Farbe und Pinsel, 1962
0 x 0 = Art, Painter without Paint and Brush
16 mm film transferred to video
ZERO Foundation Collection

Stille. Zero ist der Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich. Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne i

credits

We would like to thank all of the participating archives and photographers for their support in the realization of this publication and for kindly granting permission to reproduce their material. Despite careful research, there are cases in which it was not possible to identify the copyright holders of illustrations used in this publication. Justified claims will of course be settled according to the usual agreements. If not otherwise indicated, the ZERO Foundation was the source for material used in the illustration.

For all works, documents, and texts by Yves Klein: ©Yves Klein, VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015 / Adagp, Paris, 2015

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or otherwise, without first seeking the written permission of the copyright owners and the publishers.

WORKS
©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015 for the illustrated works by: Lucio Fontana, Yves Klein, Heinz Mack, Piero Manzoni, Otto Piene, Günther Uecker

DOCUMENTS
ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf

FILM
Gerd Winkler, 0 x 0 = Kunst. Maler ohne Farbe und Pinsel, Hessischer Rundfunk, first broadcast on June 27, 1962 ©Hessischer Rundfunk (HR), Frankfurt am Main: 94-97.

PHOTOGRAPHS
Gérald Dauphin ©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015
Peter E. Fischer / ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf
Fox Tönende Wochenschau, Bundesarchiv, Berlin ©ITN Source, London
Fabrizio Garghetti / ZERO Foundation, Duesseldorf
Maren Heyne / ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf
Hier und Heute, Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) ©WDR mediagroup GmbH, Cologne
Heinz Mack ©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015
Margret Mack / ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf
Kurt Müller / ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf
André Morain / ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf
Giorgio Molinari / Courtesy of Archives Atelier Soto, Paris
Philip Mechanicus / Maria Austria Instituut, Amsterdam
Henk Peeters / ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf
Reiner Ruthenbeck ©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2015
Hartmut Rekort, Hamburg / ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf
Hans Salentin ©VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn; ZERO Foundation and AFORK, Düsseldorf
Hans Schafgans / Archiv Kunstmuseum Bonn
Manfred Tischer ©The Estate of Manfred Tischer / www.tischer.org
Jan van Eldik / ZERO Foundation, Düsseldorf
Lothar Wolleh ©Oliver Wolleh, Berlin
Charles Wilp ©Bildagentur für Kunst, Kultur und Geschichte (bpk)
Hilde Zenker ©Berlinische Galerie – Landesmuseum für Moderne Kunst, Fotografie und Architektur, Berlin

ero. Zero ist weiss. Di Wüste Zero. Der Himmel über Zero. Die Nacht -. Zero fliesst. Das Aug

LENDERS

ZERO Foundation Collection, Düsseldorf; Adolf-Luther-Stiftung Collection, Krefeld; Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf; Morsbroich Museum, Leverkusen; Kunstmuseum Bonn; Stadtsparkasse Düsseldorf Collection; Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art Collection, Düsseldorf; Ben Brown Fine Arts, London; Sperone Westwater, New York; Ketterer Kunst, Munich; Viktor and Marianne Langen Collection; Helga and Edzard Reuter Collection, Neuss; Elizabeth Goldring Piene and Otto Piene Estate; Rira Collection; Schaub Collection, Landshut; Moresky Collection; Studio Mack Collection and Yves Klein Archives, Paris.

Zero
ist die Stille. Zero ist der
Anfang. Zero ist rund. Zero dreht sich.
Zero ist der Mond. Die Sonne ist Zero.
Zero ist weiss. Die Wüste Zero. Der Himmel
über Zero. Die Nacht - . Zero fliesst. Das Auge
Zero. Nabel. Mund. Kuss. Die Milch ist rund. Die
Blume Zero der Vogel. Schweigend. Schwebend. Ich
esse Zero, ich trinke Zero, ich schlafe Zero, ich wache
Zero, ich liebe Zero. Zero ist schön. dynamo dynamo
dynamo. Die Bäume im Frühling, der Schnee, Feuer,
Wasser, Meer. Rot orange gelb grün indigo blau violett
Zero Zero Regenbogen. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold und
Silber, Schall und Rauch Wanderzirkus Zero.
Zero ist die Stille. Zero ist der Anfang.
Zero ist rund. Zero ist
Zero

The ZERO Manifesto 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 the bird Zero. Silently. Floatingly. I eat Zero, I drink Zero, I sleep Zero, I wake Zero, I like Zero. Zero is beautiful. dynamo dynamo dynamo. The trees in the spring, snow, fire, water, sea. Red orange yellow gren ultramarine purple Zero. Zero rainbow. 4 3 2 1 Zero. Gold and silver. Sound smoke travelling circus Zero. Zero is silence. Zero is the beginning. Zero is round. Zero is Zero.

ISBN 978-605-9178-04-4