

ZERO

COUNTDOWN TO TOMORROW, 1950s-60s

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Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum Teacher Resource Unit

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s, is the first large-scale historical survey in the United States dedicated to the German artists' group Zero (1957–66), founded by Heinz Mack and Otto Piene and joined in 1961 by Günther Uecker, and ZERO, an international network of like-minded artists from Europe, Japan, and North and South America who shared the original group's aspiration to transform and redefine art in the aftermath of World War II.

Featuring more than 40 artists from 10 countries, the exhibition is organized around these diverse artists' shared interests. Themes include new definitions of painting (for instance, the use of monochrome and serial structures); movement and light; space as subject and material; and the relationship between nature, technology, and humankind.

This Resource Unit focuses on various aspects of ZERO art and provides techniques for exploring both the visual arts and other areas of the curriculum. This guide also is available on the museum's website at guggenheim.org/artscurriculum with images that can be downloaded or projected for classroom use. The images may be used for educational purposes only and are not licensed for commercial applications of any kind. Before bringing your class to the Guggenheim, we invite you to visit the exhibition, read this guide, browse our website, and decide which aspects of the exhibition are most relevant to your students. For more information on scheduling a visit for your students, please call 212 423 3637.

ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s is supported by the exhibition's Leadership Committee, with special thanks to The George Economou Collection, the committee's Founding Member, as well as to Larry Gagossian, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, and Stefan Edlis and Gael Neeson.

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From the beginning we looked upon the term [ZERO] not as an expression of nihilism—or as a dada-like gag, but as a word indicating a zone of silence and of pure possibilities for a new beginning as at the countdown when rockets take off—zero is the incommensurable zone in which the old state turns into the new. —Otto Piene¹

< NEW DEFINITIONS OF PAINTING >

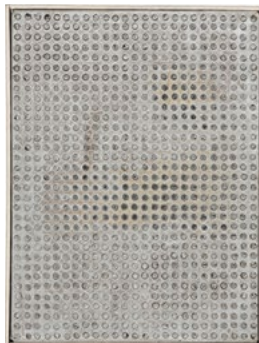
In 1957 two German artists, Heinz Mack (b. 1931) and Otto Piene (1928–2014), founded an artists' group they called Zero. The word indicated their hope for a new beginning and a kind of art that would express optimism after the devastation of World War II. Their country was still in the midst of recovery from the ravages of war—not only economically and physically but also culturally. As Mack has put it, “we were enclosed by a cultural cemetery, an information vacuum that is unimaginable today.”² The Third Reich was highly critical of avant-garde art, removing it from museums and persecuting many artists.

The two art and philosophy students believed that a postwar art of hope should emphasize light, motion, and space and reflect a minimal aesthetic. This is evidenced by their exploration of the **monochrome** and **serial structures**. They rejected the dominant European styles at the time, **Tachisme** and **Art Informel**, which used gestural abstraction to express personal feelings of trauma and angst.

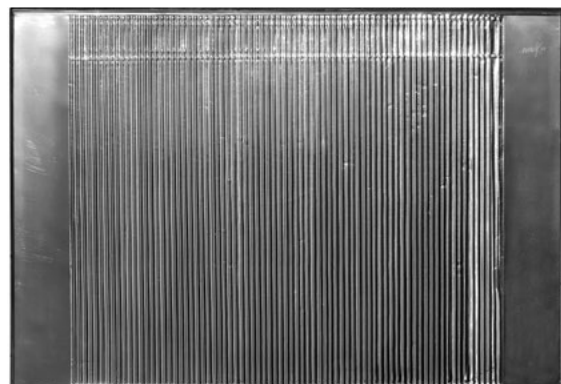
In 1957 Piene began to use stencils with hand-punched holes to apply paint to canvas and produce **relief**, or raised patterns. The monochromatic patterns in these *Stencil Paintings*, such as *Frequency* (1957), allowed him to experiment with structure and light and its potential to create the impression of movement. Piene argued that the “continuous flow of rhythmic current between painting and observer” generated by light produces “total vibration.”³

Mack wrote about similar concepts, proposing that “a number of parallel straight lines in a horizontal or vertical arrangement” could produce vibration.⁴ He experimented with these ideas in works such as *Vibration of Light* (1958), but with a new medium: aluminum. Mack discovered the material's possibilities when he “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.”⁵

LEFT: Otto Piene, *Frequency* (*Frequenz*), 1957. Oil and aluminum paint on canvas, 40.5 x 30.5 cm. Kunstmuseen Krefeld, Germany © Otto Piene. Photo: Courtesy Kunstmuseen Krefeld, Germany



RIGHT: Heinz Mack, *Vibration of Light* (*Vibration des Lichts*), 1958. Aluminum on wood, 95 x 140 cm. Studio Mack © Heinz Mack. Photo: Courtesy Atelier Prof. Heinz Mack



VIEW + DISCUSS

- ▶ Show Otto Piene, *Frequency* (1957)
- ▶ Ask students what they notice. How do they imagine Piene might have created it?
- ▶ Now compare the artwork to Heinz Mack's *Vibration of Light* (1958). What do students think is similar or different?
- ▶ Share the titles of the works and ask students to compare them. What do the titles make students think about the works?
- ▶ These artists were the two founders of a group in post-World War II Germany called Zero. They wanted to make art to reflect the optimism they felt in the postwar period. Do students think their artwork reflects optimism? Why or why not?
- ▶ Mack and Piene were interested in how the serial structure and the raised reliefs of these artworks could interact with light to create a sense of vibration or movement. Ask students if they have ever seen light create the impression of vibration. How do students imagine these works could create the impression of vibration?
- ▶ Group Zero wanted to distinguish itself from major art currents in Europe at the time, Tachisme and Art Informel. Look online for images of art associated with Tachisme and Art Informel and ask students to compare them to these Group Zero artworks.

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Mack was fascinated by aluminum's ability to make light look like it was "set to vibrating."⁶ For this activity, students will experiment with the possibilities of aluminum foil. First, hand out a sheet to each student. Ask them to come up with ten different ways of manipulating it. How do these manipulations affect light? Now, ask students to focus on creating a relief with a piece of aluminum foil. Mack discovered his techniques when he "accidentally stepped on a thin piece of metal foil that was lying on a sisal mat." What are some other ways students can make reliefs? What kinds of tools can they use?

According to Mack, "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."⁷ Challenge students to create their own "light relief." Does it come alive with the addition of light? How?

- Piene used stencils with punched-in holes to create paintings with relief patterns. For this activity, students will create stencils using pieces of cardboard and tools such as hole punches—or they can find tools that are stencil-like, such as strainers or graters. Students should use the stencils to create paintings by laying them on top of paper or canvas and applying paint. Reflect on the process and products. Ask students to discuss why an artist might choose to use stencils.
- One of the first artists outside of Germany to be associated with the larger ZERO network was Yves Klein (1928–1962). Klein saw monochrome paintings as an "open window to freedom, as the possibility of being immersed in the immeasurable existence of color."⁸ He is most closely associated with a color he developed with a chemist, named after himself, and patented: International Klein Blue (IKB). Drawing on his study of Eastern religions, he associated the color with infinity.

For this activity, tell students they will make a monochrome painting, but first they have to "invent" a color. Provide them with blue, red, yellow, black, and white paint and allow them to experiment with color mixing. Then discuss: Which kinds of colors do they think best represent their personalities? Bright or dull? Pastel? Fluorescent? Have students mix just one color to represent their personality, and name it. Then they should paint an entire sheet of paper or canvas that color. Present the colors to the class. What does each color say about the painter?

I have a very simple theory. I have always pretended that objects themselves formed a self-composition. My composition consisted of allowing them to compose themselves. —Arman⁹

< EVERYDAY MATERIALS >

From ZERO's earliest days, when Heinz Mack (b. 1931) discovered the possibilities of a piece of metal foil, artists associated with the network were interested in using nontraditional materials. They believed that incorporating contemporary items helped them create artwork more relevant to their time. ZERO artists often integrated these everyday materials into works that feature serial, grid-like structures, repetition, and **modular** forms.

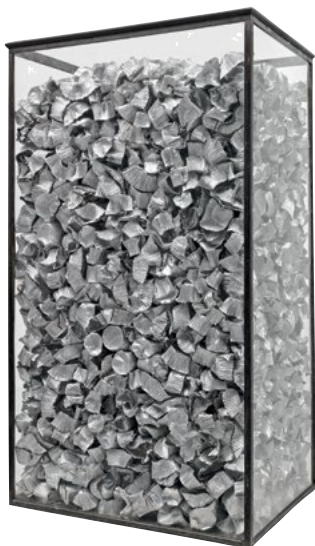
Artists associated not just with ZERO but also with Nouveau Réalisme (New Realism) were especially interested in the “new realities” of postwar society and the explosion of consumer-goods production in the wake of the privations of war. They expressed an interest in a “poetic recycling of urban, industrial and advertising reality.”¹⁰

Arman (1928–2005), a French artist linked to Nouveau Réalisme and ZERO, created *The Little Sweets* in 1961 by collecting aluminum pastry wrappers and gathering them in a glass

case. Unlike most ZERO artists, he imposed no structure on the presentation other than the case. *Little Sweets* is part of his series *Accumulations* that presents everyday, mass-produced materials or refuse (such as old dolls or costume jewelry) in Plexiglas or glass boxes.

Christian Megert (b. 1936), a Swiss artist, used a more standardized and utilitarian material: the mirror. He created wall-mounted, boxlike reliefs such as *Mirror Box* (1965). He also made a large installation of stacked rows of mirror panels that hang floor to ceiling. These mirror works reflect the tenets of his 1961 **manifesto** “a new space”: “i want to build a new space, a space without beginning and end, where everything lives and is invited to live, a space quiet and loud, immovable and moving.”¹¹

Regardless of the specific materials they used and how, ZERO artists' incorporation of everyday materials forged a link between art and life, art and everyday reality.



LEFT: Arman, *The Little Sweets* (*Les petites gourmandises*), 1961. Aluminum foil in glass case, 93 x 53 x 39 cm. Arman Marital Trust, Corice Arman Trustee © Arman. Photo: Kristopher McKay © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

RIGHT: Christian Megert, *Mirror Box* (*Spiegelkasten*), 1965. Mirror in wood box, 103 x 70 x 10 cm. The Mayor Gallery, London © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ProLitteris, Zurich. Photo: Courtesy The Mayor Gallery, London

VIEW + DISCUSS

- ▶ Show Arman, *The Little Sweets* (1961)
- ▶ What do students notice about this artwork? How do the materials and the way the artist used the materials differ from traditional sculpture?
- ▶ For this work, Arman gathered aluminum foil pastry wrappers and put them in a glass case. For other works in his series *Accumulations*, he gathered discarded objects such as doll parts and costume jewelry. Ask students if they have ever gathered their own group of similar objects and why. What did they do with them?
- ▶ Compare Arman's material choices to those of Christian Megert, who worked with mirrors. Ask students to compare the qualities of and associations with the different materials.
- ▶ Group Zero was founded with an interest in light, monochrome painting, and movement (or vibration). Do students see those initial interests manifest in Arman and Megert's artworks? Why or why not? Can they think of other materials that could address those initial interests?
- ▶ Ask students to turn to a partner and discuss: If you were an artist and had to pick a signature material, what would it be and why? What would you do with it?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Arman's *The Little Sweets* is part of a series called *Accumulations*. Another artist associated with ZERO, Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), also made artworks called *Accumulations*. Kusama covered everyday objects in materials like macaroni and flowers.

For this activity, challenge students to make their own "accumulation." Discuss the meaning of the word first. Then ask them to think about what kinds of materials they would be interested in accumulating and why. (Students need not be specific. Just ask them to think of the qualities of the material, such as old versus new.) Their homework assignment is to collect, or accumulate, a particular type of object and bring it back to school. The next day ask them to consider a few alternative ways to arrange these objects. For instance, they might arrange them in a highly organized way like Megert or more loosely like Arman. Kusama linked her objects by painting them all one color. Students should select a final presentation strategy. Share the final works. What do students' artworks say about them, their interests, or their process?

- The artists associated with Nouveau Réalisme were interested in a "poetic recycling of urban, industrial and advertising reality."¹² For this activity, challenge students to do a "poetic recycling" of words in their environment, whether urban, industrial, advertising-related, or all three. Ask them to jot down or photograph words that they see around them. Then have them arrange these words into a poem. They can arrange the words in a highly organized way like Megert's art or allow them to "compose themselves" as Arman did with his objects. They can also make shapes with the words as in concrete poetry. Read the poems aloud and show them to the class (since their visual form will also matter). What do the poems say about the environment students live in?
- ZERO artists often accompanied their artwork with writing stating their strongly held beliefs about what art should be. Megert's 1961 manifesto titled "a new space" read: "i want to build a new space, a space without beginning and end, where everything lives and is invited to live, a space quiet and loud, immovable and moving."¹³ Arman and a number of his colleagues signed a statement that said, "The Nouveaux Réalistes are aware of their collective singularity. Nouveau Réalisme = a new perceptive approach to reality."¹⁴

For this activity, challenge students to research artistic manifestos of the past. Which manifestos align most closely with the students' beliefs? They should collect statements from various manifestos and collage them together to form a loosely organized manifesto of their own.

I don't mean just the classical Greek elements: fire, water, air, and earth. I also mean the human elements such as action, reaction, involvement, and participation. —Otto Piene¹⁵

< PROCESS >

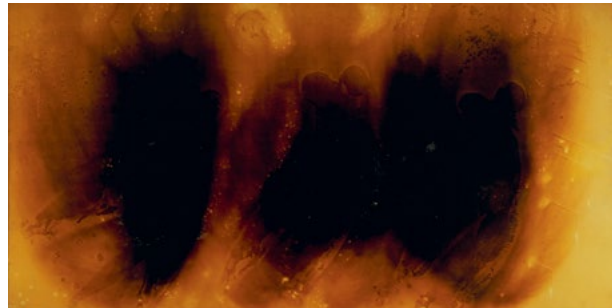
ZERO artists developed new, and often spectacular, destructive processes for making art, including nailing and shooting arrows into objects, painting with fire and smoke, slicing and drilling canvases and metal sheets, and engineering explosions. Creation came out of destruction. For these artists, who had lived through World War II, the acts confirmed that new, positive, and beautiful things could emerge from devastation.

Lucio Fontana (1899–1968) first began puncturing paper surfaces and cutting through canvases in the late 1940s. The works reveal the space within and beyond the **picture plane**, and declare that a painting is an object and not just a surface. Though he experimented with their size and shape, the hole and slash became his signature **gestures**. In 1968 he told an interviewer that “my discovery was the hole and that’s it. I am happy to go to the grave after such a discovery.”¹⁶ Each cut in his *Concetti spaziale* series (1947–68) was made with a single gesture using a sharp blade, though the support could be canvas, metal relief, paper, or sculpture.

Yves Klein (1928–1962) was an important figure in the ZERO network. In 1957 he came to Germany for an exhibition of his work and brought not only his revolutionary *Monochrome* paintings but also a confidence in his role as an artist that made a strong impression on the founders of Group Zero. Klein was preoccupied with the natural elements. He worked with the earth in the form of pure pigments, as well as with wind, rain, and fire. Klein used Bunsen burners and flamethrowers to make some of his pictures. For *Untitled Fire Painting (F 81)* (ca. 1961) he had a nude female model (a “living paintbrush”) use her body to apply water to the fiberboard. Klein later burned it to create ghostlike traces of the human form. Klein had developed this “living paintbrush” method earlier by covering models in paint and directing them to make marks on paper.

BELOW LEFT: Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale, Attese*, 1959. Synthetic paint on canvas, olive green, 125 x 250.8 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, Gift, Mrs. Teresita Fontana, Milan 77.2322 © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/SIAE, Rome. Photo: David Heald © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York

BELOW RIGHT: Yves Klein, *Untitled Fire Painting (F 81)*, ca. 1961. Charred laminated fiberboard, 130.2 x 250.2 cm. The Menil Collection, Houston © 2014 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Photo: Geoffrey Clements, New York



VIEW + DISCUSS

- ▶ Show: Lucio Fontana, *Concetto spaziale, Attese* (1959)
- ▶ What do students notice about the artwork? To make it, Fontana slashed a canvas multiple times with a sharp blade. Compare this process and its product to traditional art making.
- ▶ Now look together at Yves Klein's *Untitled Fire Painting (F 81)* (ca. 1961). What do students notice about it?
- ▶ Klein made this work by having a “living paintbrush” (or nude model) apply water to her body and roll it onto the fiberboard. Then Klein used a flamethrower to burn the surface.
- ▶ On the board, list words or phrases students would use to describe the processes Klein and Fontana engaged in.
- ▶ ZERO artists lived through the violence and destruction of World War II. Ask students what connections they see between the words and phrases they listed and the historical context.
- ▶ On the back of his canvases, Fontana wrote the Italian word *attesa* (meaning “expectation,” “hope,” or “waiting”) if he made one cut, and *attese* (plural) if he made multiple cuts. Ask students why they think he chose this word, given the process, the product, and the context.

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- While their methods could be violent, ZERO artists often displayed great humor. In a comically short 1962 performance for Belgian television, Fontana took a few seconds to fill a fellow artist’s monochrome work with slashes. In an ironic comment afterward, Fontana said he had “never been so satisfied.”¹⁷ Klein sometimes made his “living paintbrush” paintings in front of an audience, and in 1960 he had a performance accompanied by a “symphony” that consisted of a single note and silence.¹⁸

Challenge students to react to something painful in their personal life or in their country’s present or past with humor. They can write, paint, perform, make photographs, or respond in any other way.

- ZERO artists learned that a destructive act could also be a creative one. In your classroom, give students a selection of art materials and challenge them to work in small groups to experiment with one question in mind: How can a destructive act become a creative one? Encourage them to find several answers to this question. Discuss afterward. How are the products different than what the students normally create? How did it feel to make art this way?
- As an addendum to the above activity, explore the same question about creation out of destruction in writing. Ask students to conduct a brainstorming session about how it could apply to poetry. Then they should perform a destructive act in order to create poetry. (For example, they could tear up an old magazine and rearrange the scraps to form a poem.) Ask similar reflection questions to those above.

. . . *make something, which cannot ‘perform’ without the assistance of its environment . . .*
—Hans Haacke¹⁹

◀ ENVIRONMENT ▶

After observing the destructive power of humankind during World War II, ZERO artists were drawn to the regenerative potential in nature. Early in Group Zero’s history, its founders, Otto Piene (1928–2014) and Heinz Mack (b. 1931), explored the play of light on the surface of relief paintings and aluminum. Later, Yves Klein (1928–1962) devised methods to make artworks with natural elements including earth, wind, and fire. Artists such as Klein explored the power of nature by burning the surfaces of their artworks. ZERO artists also used natural materials such as feathers and sand in their works.

ZERO artists did not limit themselves to nature on earth. The open sky and space exploration also fascinated them. Art historian Dirk Pörschmann has argued that they sought to realize a **utopian** vision after the catastrophes of war: “It was the generation born around 1930 that once again dared to look to the sky, the earth having shown itself to be intolerable.”²⁰

Not only were ZERO artists interested in the environment in the ecological sense, they also created their own environments, or **installations**, often using natural elements. Many ZERO installations demonstrated the artists’ desire to work outside of institutions,



particularly museums, and create experiential art in the natural world. Mack conceived his *Sahara Project* during trips to Morocco in the late 1950s, and he published a text about it in the third and final edition of the journal *ZERO*.²¹ He wanted to create thirteen art “stations” in the middle of the desert. The stations would display, among other things, sand reliefs, an oasis, a hundred-meter-long mirrored wall, and a cube participating artists could enter as a meditative space. In his words, the plan included “forests of fungus growth . . . screens of rising columns of smoke and fire . . . and catapulted flashes of light.” The final station would be devoted to the sky: “Silver balloons, floating in the sky, carry invisible nets, in which light-reflecting membranes are hanging.”²² Mack realized some aspects of this ambitious project during visits to Tunisia and Algeria in the late 1960s and the ’70s.

Heinz Mack in the Grand Erg Oriental, south of the Timimoun Oasis, southern Algeria, 1976. Photo: Thomas Hoepker

VIEW + DISCUSS

- ▶ Ask students if they've ever dreamed of doing something that seemed impossible. What was it? What seemed impossible about it? What drew them to the idea?
- ▶ Show: Heinz Mack in the Grand Erg Oriental, south of the Timimoun Oasis, southern Algeria (1976)
- ▶ What do students notice about it? What would students guess about the artist based on this image and why?
- ▶ Mack wanted to create an art installation in the middle of the desert. In the film *Telemack* (1968), he wore a reflective silver suit like those in this photograph (taken later); in line with his text on the *Sahara Project*, he erected a number of his sculptures in the desert and also used silver fabric as a tool for harnessing the effects of natural light. What would be the challenges and rewards of creating an artwork in an environment like the Sahara desert (as opposed to in a gallery or museum)? What does Mack's project suggest about the artist's goals and interests?
- ▶ Mack loved boundless natural space: "In such spaces, the clarity of light and the fullness of the silence are forever expanding. . . . Such spaces are: the sky, the sea, Antarctica, the deserts. Within these the reservations of art will float like artificial islands."²³ Why do students think he wanted to show art in these boundless spaces?
- ▶ Ask students what environment they would choose to set an artwork in and why. What challenges would they face?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Mack was not the only ZERO artist to dream up a challenging art project related to the natural environment. Yves Klein symbolically signed the sky above Nice, France, and dreamed of dyeing the sea with his trademark blue pigment.²⁴ Encourage students to dream up a challenging project that makes a mark on the natural environment. They should write a proposal for the project that describes the materials, methods, and potential difficulties.
- ZERO artists used natural elements—air, earth, fire, and water—as materials and tools. Klein, for example, burned fiberboard. Set up a nature studio in your classroom. Provide natural materials such as dirt, flowers, sand, stones, and water as well as tools to manipulate air and light, such as fans, flashlights, and mirrors. More standard art supplies should also be available. Challenge students working in pairs to pick one natural element and come up with three ways to use that element to make artwork. What did they discover about the potential of those elements? If they had more resources and time, what else would they create related to that element?
- Many ZERO artists were interested in the natural environment, but some also created their own environments, or installations (as they are often termed in the art world). Discuss the definition of an art installation: a work of art that usually consists of multiple components and mediums and that is often exhibited in a large space in an arrangement specified by the artist. For instance, Otto Piene's *Light Ballets* (1959–2014) cast abstract forms in dark spaces. For this activity, assign students to create plans for an installation of their own. Use four pieces of foam core to create a space with two walls, a floor, and a ceiling. Then, using collage materials, students should install an artwork in the space. How does their artwork transform the perception of the space?

*These artists who cannot collaborate work from the stomach, the plexus, the intestines.
The artists who collaborate are those who work with the heart and the head. —Yves Klein²⁵*

< NETWORK >

What started in 1957 as a small group of German artists grew to a larger cohort of like-minded artists from various parts of Europe, Japan, and North and South America. In many ways, the affiliation was loose. It was not a **movement** with the cohesiveness that implies, but rather a web of international connections that curator Valerie Hillings has termed a “**network**.” “Group Zero” and “Zero” are used to refer to the smaller German artists’ group of Heinz Mack (b. 1931), Otto Piene (1928–2014), and Günther Uecker (b. 1930), and “ZERO” is used to refer to the larger network of artists who worked together in the late 1950s and the ’60s. Despite their collaborative efforts, even the original German artists of Zero thought of themselves as “no group in a definitely organized way.”²⁶ Similarly, the other artists who took part in ZERO-related activities had their own individual careers and many were simultaneously affiliated with other groups and movements.

By the mid-1960s, the artists in the ZERO network had less time and fewer opportunities to connect and work together. They were engaged in an increasing number of projects, and often at a great distance from one another. Due in part to this swelling demand and popularity, the German group disbanded in 1966, and the high period of activity for ZERO came to an end.

However, many traces of their shared vision and aspirations remain. Perhaps the best answer comes directly from the founding artists. For the catalogue of a 1963 exhibition on the larger ZERO network, Mack, Piene, and Uecker composed a poem together. To write it, the artists took turns contributing lines, and this process determined the order of the phrases. The final product represents key ZERO qualities and imagery:

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

Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, and Günther Uecker, poem originally published in German on poster and in leaflet for *ZERO – Der neue Idealismus*, *poetisches Manifest*, Galerie Diogenes, Berlin, 1963

VIEW + DISCUSS

- ▶ Ask students to read the poem by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, and Günther Uecker on their own and then discuss it in pairs. How would students describe the imagery, syntax, rhythm, and tone in the poem?
- ▶ This poem was written jointly by the three German artists in Group Zero. Based on the poem, what would students guess about the group?
- ▶ They wrote the poem together by taking turns contributing lines and letting the process determine the order of the phrases. Ask students: What does the artists' process for creating the poem suggest about the group? What do students think it would be like to write a poem that way? What are the challenges and rewards?
- ▶ This poem appeared in a catalogue for a 1963 exhibition. Ask students what kind of artwork they imagine was shown in the exhibition.
- ▶ Read the quote at the beginning of this section to students and ask if they agree with the ideas it expresses. Should collaboration be an important part of art making? Why or why not?

EXPLORATIONS

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

- Otto Piene described the organization of Zero (and ZERO) this way:

Mack, Uecker, and I now form, let's say, the "inner circle" of Zero. . . . 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. . . . There is no obligation to take part, no "should" or "must" (one of the reasons, I think, why Zero is still growing). . . . 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 for a synthesis of different personal ideas. This synthesis might be richer than the few ideas which a single artist usually is able to investigate.²⁷

Ask students to discuss this statement as a class. What do they think of his take on teamwork? Do they identify with his ideas, such as his sense that the network was growing because there was "no obligation to take part"? How do they see connections to these ideas in their own lives? Assign students to write an essay in response, stating whether they agree or disagree and using examples from history and their own lives.

- The three artists of the original German artists' group, Zero, worked together to write texts such as the poem printed in this section.

For this activity, students will write collaborative texts in groups of three. They should work together to come up with a strategy for writing collaboratively. Ask students to read the resulting texts aloud and to discuss the products and the methods. How do the poems vary? What are the challenges and rewards of writing collaboratively?

- Like other far-flung networks of artists, ZERO exchanged and spread ideas in part by creating magazines with artwork reproductions, essays, and other features. On the final page of the third issue of the magazine *ZERO*, for instance, one artist included a match and encouraged readers to burn the book. Another artist attached a sunflower seed and directed readers to plant it in good soil.²⁸

For this activity, create a magazine or a blog as a class. Students should submit artwork and texts and dream up other interactive elements. If it is a magazine, photocopy, assemble, and distribute copies throughout the school, and send copies to students at a far-flung school, if possible. If it is a blog, publish it online and share the link via e-mail or social networks. What feedback do students get? How does it feel to communicate ideas this way as opposed to in person?

ART INFORMEL

Term used for a tendency in postwar European painting characterized by the gestural and expressive, often with repetitive calligraphic marks and anticompositional formats. Related to Abstract Expressionism, which is often considered its American equivalent (adapted from the Guggenheim website)

GESTURE

A movement usually of the body or limbs that expresses or emphasizes an idea, sentiment, or attitude; specifically, in art, movement during the act of painting

INSTALLATION

A work of art that usually consists of multiple components and mediums and that is often exhibited in a large space in an arrangement specified by the artist

MANIFESTO

A written statement that describes the policies, goals, and opinions of a person or group

MODULAR

Constructed with standardized units or dimensions for flexibility and variety in use

MONOCHROME

A painting, drawing, or photograph in a single hue

(ART) MOVEMENT

A common artistic style, approach, and/or philosophy that links a group of artists, usually for a specific period of time

NETWORK

A group of people or organizations that are connected and that work with each other

PICTURE PLANE

The surface of a picture

RELIEF (PAINTING)

Painting with a raised surface

SERIAL STRUCTURE

Something built, organized, or arranged in a series, rank, or row

TACHISME

One manifestation of Art Informel, from the French *tache*, meaning a spot or stain (adapted from the Guggenheim website)

UTOPIAN

Having impossibly ideal conditions, especially of social organization

(adapted from *Merriam-Webster* unless otherwise noted)

BOOKS

Barron, Stephanie, and Sabine Eckmann. *Art of Two Germanys: Cold War Cultures*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2009.

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Kaiser, Philipp, and Miwon Kwon, eds. *Ends of the Earth: Land Art to 1974*. Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Munich: Prestel Verlag, 2012.

Piène, Otto, and Heinz Mack, eds. *ZERO*. Translated by Howard Beckman. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973.

Stiles, Kristine, ed. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012.

Tiampo, Ming, and Alexandra Munroe, eds. *Gutai: Splendid Playground*. Exh. cat. New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2013.

VIDEOS

A short documentary on Heinz Mack
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJKc5lGdbS4>

An Yves Klein *Anthropometries* performance
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqLwA0yinWg>

WEBSITES

Arman's official website: <http://www.armanstudio.com>

Tachisme and Art Informel in the Guggenheim Museum Collection: <http://www.guggenheim.org/new-york/collections/collection-online/movements/195205>

Yves Klein Archives: <http://www.yveskleinarchives.org>

ZERO foundation: <http://www.zerofoundation.de/foundation.html>

NOTES

- ¹ Otto Piene, "The Development of the Group 'Zero,'" *The Times Literary Supplement*, Sept. 3, 1964, pp. 812–13, reprinted in *ZERO*, ed. Piene and Heinz Mack, trans. Howard Beckman (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973), p. xx.
- ² Heinz Mack quoted in Wieland Schmied, "Arbeit am Projekt der Moderne: Über Heinz Mack und den Mythos vom Künstler als Konstrukteur neuer Welten," in *Utopie und Wirklichkeit im Werk von Heinz Mack*, ed. Schmied (Cologne: DuMont, 1998), pp. 10–13, reprinted and trans. as "Working on the Project of Modernism: About Heinz Mack and the Myth of the Artist as Engineer Designing New Worlds," in *ZERO aus Deutschland 1957–1966: Und heute*, ed. Renate Wiehager, exh. cat. (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2000), p. 117.
- ³ Otto Piene, "Über die Reinheit des Lichts, *ZERO 2* (Oct. 1958), pp. 24–27, reprinted and trans. as "On the Purity of Light" in *ZERO* (1973), p. 47.
- ⁴ Heinz Mack, "Die neue dynamische Struktur," *ZERO 1* (Apr. 1958), pp. 24–27, reprinted and trans. as "The New Dynamic Structure" in *ZERO* (1973), p. 15.
- ⁵ Heinz Mack, "Die Ruhe der Unruhe," *ZERO 2* (Oct. 1958), pp. 20–23, reprinted and trans. as "Resting Restlessness" in *ZERO* (1973), p. 41.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ Yves Klein, quoted in Paul Wember, *Yves Klein* (Cologne: Verlag M. Dumont Schauberg, 1972), pp. 9, 11.
- ⁹ Arman, quoted in Daniel Abadie, *Arman: L'âge de fer et ses monuments* (Paris: Galerie Beaubourg, 1977).
- ¹⁰ Pierre Restany, *60/90: Trente ans de Nouveau Réalisme* (Paris: La Différence, 1990), p. 76, quoted in "New Realism," Centre Pompidou Educational Dossiers, <http://mediation.centrepompidou.fr/education/ressources/ENS-newrea-EN/ENS-newrea-EN.htm>
- ¹¹ Christian Megert, "a new space" (Copenhagen, 1961), reprinted in *Christian Megert: A New Space*, exh. cat. (London: The Mayor Gallery, 2012), p. 7.
- ¹² Restany, *60/90*, p. 76.
- ¹³ Megert, "a new space," p. 7.
- ¹⁴ Pierre Restany et al., *Déclaration constitutive du Nouveau Réalisme* (Paris, Oct. 27, 1960).
- ¹⁵ Otto Piene, "Elements," in *Otto Piene: Elements*, exh. cat. (New York: Howard Wise Gallery, 1969), n.p.
- ¹⁶ Sarah Whitfield, ed., *Lucio Fontana*, exh. cat. (London: Hayward Gallery, 1999), p. 12, quoted in Sophie Howarth, "Lucio Fontana: Spatial Concept 'Waiting' 1960" (2000), Tate, <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/fontana-spatial-concept-waiting-t00694/text-summary>
- ¹⁷ Belgian television program recorded Dec. 3, 1962, in the Knokke home of collector Louis Bogaerts and broadcast by Vlaamser Radio- en Televisieomroeporganisatie. See Margriet Schavemaker, "Performing Zero," in Valerie Hillings, *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2014), p. 51.
- ¹⁸ "Yves Klein, *Anthropometry: Princess Helena, 1960*" (2008), Museum of Modern Art, http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=80530
- ¹⁹ Hans Haacke, untitled statement, in *nul negentienhonderd vijf en zestig*, exh. cat., vol. 1, *teksten* (Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1965), n.p., quoted in Valerie Hillings, "Countdown to a New Beginning," in Hillings, *ZERO: Countdown*, p. 39. Punctuation reflects the original.
- ²⁰ Dirk Pörschmann, "Where No Man Has Gone Before: Utopia Zero," in Hillings, *ZERO: Countdown*, p. 62.
- ²¹ Heinz Mack, "The Sahara Project," *ZERO 3* (July 1961), reprinted in *ZERO* (1973), pp. 180–84. See also Pörschmann, "Where No Man Has Gone Before," p. 63.
- ²² Mack, "The Sahara Project," pp. 182, 184.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 180.
- ²⁴ Pörschmann, "Where No Man Has Gone Before," p. 63.
- ²⁵ Yves Klein, "Discours prononcé à l'occasion de l'Exposition TINGUELY à DUSSELDORF (janvier 1959)," in Klein, *Le dépassement de la problématique de l'art* (La Louvière, Belgium: Éditions de Montbliart, 1959), pp. 19–22, reprinted and trans. as "Discourse on the Occasion of Tinguely's Exhibition in Düsseldorf, January 1959," in *Yves Klein, 1928–1962: A Retrospective*, exh. cat. (Houston: Institute for the Arts, Rice University, 1982), p. 233.
- ²⁶ *Group Zero: Mack Piene Uecker*, exh. cat. (London: McRoberts and Tunnard Gallery, 1964), quoted in Hillings, "Countdown to a New Beginning," p. 35.
- ²⁷ Otto Piene, "Development of the Group 'Zero,'" xxi.
- ²⁸ See Hillings, "Countdown to a New Beginning," p. 29.