

TOP STORIES IN NEW YORK

1 of 11



Rift Grows Between De Blasio, New York ...



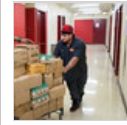
2 of 11

Calls for Calm as Ebola Fears Grow



3 of 11

Sandy Aid Delayed for Thousands



Food Pantries Grow on New York Campuses

NY CULTURE

Counting Down From Zero

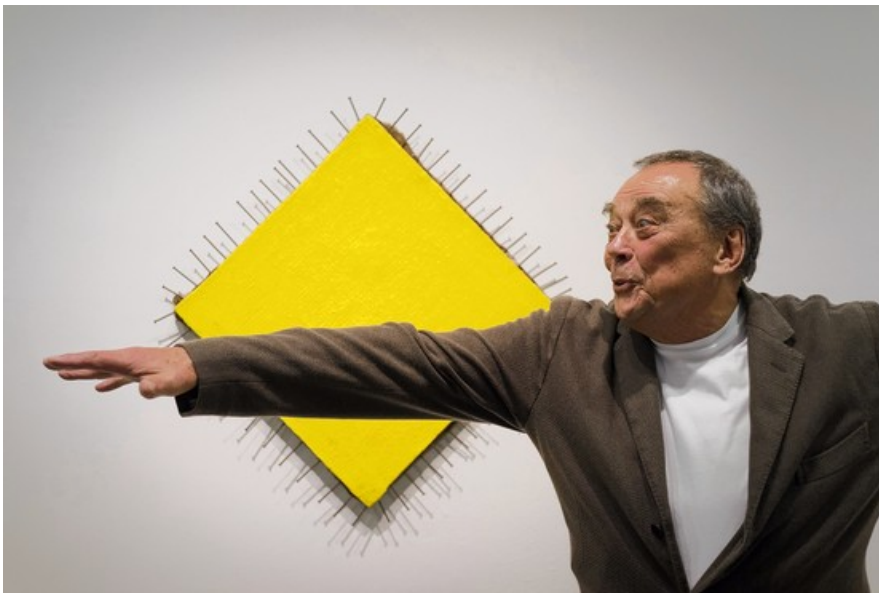
'Zero: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s' Opens Friday at the Guggenheim Museum

Email Print 0 Comments



By ANDY BATTAGLIA

Oct. 9, 2014 9:58 p.m. ET



Günther Uecker in front of his 'The Yellow Picture (Das gel be Bild),' 1957-58, which is part of the exhibit 'ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s' at the Guggenheim Museum. Andrew Hinderaker for The Wall Street Journal

A collection of dancing lights and whirring machines, opening Friday at the Guggenheim Museum, is resuming a vision of the future put on hold 50 years ago.

The exhibition, "Zero: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s," focuses on Zero, a collective of mostly European artists that formed in the aftermath of World War II. Its three German leaders— Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker —proposed jettisoning the past and charging into new possibilities ahead.

"The future is an illusion," Mr. Uecker said. "The future is now."

The spirit of the movement was existentialism mixed with excitability more than despair. "We had all kinds of dark experience, so light itself became the real event," said Mr. Mack. "We started searching for luminosity."

The name Zero was adopted to evoke a rocket countdown at the point of blastoff, and the art conceived by the group included early forays into minimalist sculpture as well as works incorporating light and land.

The future, however, wasn't always welcoming, at least in the U.S. Though some Zero-affiliated artists found favor abroad—including Yves Klein, Lucio Fontana and



Popular Now

What's This?

ARTICLES

1 **Opinion: The Global Warming Statistical Meltdown**



2 **Cuba at Forefront of Ebola Battle in Africa**



3 **White House Considers Closing Guantanamo**



4 **Amazon to Open a Physical Store**



5 **Opinion: America Is 'War on Women' Weary**



Jean Tinguely—the group itself has remained little-known outside of Europe.

That is starting to change: The Guggenheim exhibition marks the first museum show for the group in the U.S. since 1964, and galleries with concurrent Zero-related shows include Sperone Westwater and Moeller Fine Art.

“Up until 10 or 15 years ago, you really had to educate people in the art world about why they were so important,” said David Leiber, a director at David Zwirner Gallery who staged a Zero retrospective while working at Sperone Westwater in 2008. “Now the market has exploded for these artists, and their works are collected all over the world.”

“At the time, the three main Zero artists were totally new information to many people,” Angela Westwater said of her gallery’s influential show, which led to others, including a survey of old and new work by Mr. Mack opening Friday at Sperone Westwater.

The more comprehensive Guggenheim exhibition features 40 artists from 10 countries, with a spotlight on the German trio at the core. Mr. Uecker, now 84 years old, and Mr. Mack, 83, said they are happy to be back in a city they first visited in the ‘60s. (Mr. Piene, their colleague, died this summer at the age of 86.)

“It was like a door opening to the whole world, so lively and full of future,” Mr. Mack said of Zero’s first experience of New York.

Mr. Uecker remembered his world then adapting to change: “In New York it became a new element of reality: people dancing in the streets.”

Their obscurity in America owed to a mix of nationalistic friction and suspicion of collective activity, according to Valerie Hillings, curator of the Guggenheim show.

“I think it was partly about American artists promoting the American avant-garde, and the German aspect was a bit of a problem, still a fresh wound from the war,” Ms. Hillings said. “There was a hesitation over group art practice and a high fear of communism.”

Those same traits, however, are what drew her to Zero. “I was interested in why someone would go outside their individuality and ego and choose to work together,” Ms. Hillings said. “Most of them walked through the rubble of the postwar period, and they had seen the total end of the world and survived. The lights had come back on.”

Mr. Mack said the sense of collectivity was crucial to the group.

“The friendship was like life itself, visible but completely inexplicable,” he said. “But the inexplicable has coordinates providing it with a location in space and time. In this sense I do not shy away from speaking of friendships as constellations of stars.”

Walking through the Guggenheim as the Zero group’s work was being installed, Mr. Uecker paused to appreciate kinetic sculptures that spin and shoot out light as well as paintings that quietly contemplate the void.

“Beauty is the shine of truth,” he said, “but then the shine can be deceitful.”

By his own “New York Dancer” from 1965, Mr. Uecker did a pirouette in the presence of a sculpture made from a large sheet of draped cloth pierced with nails. Every 10 minutes, a motor turns on and makes it whirl.

“The poet Mayakovsky said poetry is made with a hammer,” he said. “I am happy to see this work is so fresh. It hasn’t been left in time.”

VIDEO

1 **Are Chimps People Too? A Potential Legal Evolution**



2 **Inside a Russian Billionaire's \$300 Million Yacht**



3 **Why Top Students Are Being Rejected by In-State Schools**



4 **Tesla Motors Unveils New Automated Driving System**



5 **Opinion: Ukraine Energy Czar on Gas Supplies and Negotiating Putin**



[Email](#) [Print](#) [0 Comments](#) [Order Reprints](#)