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NEWS RELEASE

Guggenheim Museum Presents *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s*

First Large-Scale Museum Exhibition in the United States on the Influential Post-World War II German Artists' Group Zero and the International ZERO Network

Exhibition: *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s*
Venue: Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1071 Fifth Avenue, New York
Location: Full rotunda and ramps, High Gallery, Tower Level 7
Dates: October 10, 2014–January 7, 2015
Media Preview: Thursday, October 9, 10 am–1 pm

(NEW YORK, NY – August 26, 2014) — From October 10, 2014 to January 7, 2015, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presents *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s*, the first large-scale survey in a United States museum dedicated to the history of the experimental German artists' group Zero (1957–66) and ZERO, an international network of artists that shared the group's aspiration to redefine and transform art in the aftermath of World War II. The exhibition features work by the three core members of Group Zero—Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, and Günther Uecker—and by more than 40 artists from 10 countries who comprised the larger ZERO network, including Lucio Fontana, Yayoi Kusama, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, Jesús Rafael Soto, Jean Tinguely, and Herman de Vries. These artists found common cause in the desire to use novel materials drawn from everyday life, nature, and technology and to develop innovative techniques and formats such as room-scaled installations, kinetic artworks, and live art actions. Focusing on the points of intersection, exchange, and collaboration that define the ZERO artists' shared history, the exhibition is at once a snapshot of a specific group and a portrait of a generation. *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s* celebrates the pioneering nature of ZERO art and the transnational vision advanced by this network of artists during a pivotal decade.

The exhibition is organized by Valerie Hillings, Curator and Manager, Curatorial Affairs, Abu Dhabi Project, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, with Edouard Derom, Curatorial Assistant, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

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 Gagosian, Axel Vervoordt Gallery, and Stefan Edlis and Gael Neeson.

Additional funding is provided by Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann, the Swiss Arts Council Pro Helvetia, Anna and Gerhard Lenz, Mondriaan Fund, The David W. Bermant Foundation, and an anonymous donor.

Support for this exhibition is also provided by Sperone Westwater; Beck & Eggeling International Fine Art; Cees and Inge de Bruin; Sigifredo di Canossa; Patrick Derom; Yvonne and Edward Hillings; Dominique Lévy Gallery; Nicole and Jean-Claude Marian; The Mayor Gallery; Mnuchin Gallery; Achim Moeller, Moeller Fine Art, New York; Robert and Irmgard Rademacher Family; David Zwirner, New York/London; Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen e.V. Stuttgart; Walter and Nicole Leblanc Foundation; Consulate General of the Federal Republic of Germany New York; The Government of Flanders through Flanders House New York; and Netherland-America Foundation.

Exhibition Overview

In 1957 Düsseldorf-based artists Heinz Mack and Otto Piene formed an artists’ group that they called Zero. The name, as Piene noted, was chosen to denote “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.” Günther Uecker joined Group Zero in 1961, becoming its third member. In the late 1950s and ’60s, an era marked by increased optimism after World War II, Mack, Piene, and Uecker played a major role in reinvigorating the contemporary art scene in Germany. They also established connections with like-minded practitioners from Europe, Japan, and North and South America who aspired to develop a new and forward-looking vision for art. This larger network of artists emerged from their varied experiences of the war with a shared interest in exchanging ideas across borders and developing visual languages relevant to their own time. The dialogues and collaborations stemming from their impulse to connect proved instrumental in remapping the European art scene, activating Amsterdam, Antwerp, Düsseldorf, and Milan as avant-garde centers. For most of these artists, the engagement with the international ZERO network was one among many pursuits and affiliations. The term “network” is thus used to underscore connectivity without suggesting cohesiveness.

Filling the Guggenheim’s rotunda and an adjacent gallery, *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s* explores the artworks, exhibitions, publications, and live events comprising the history of the ZERO network, as well as the artists’ common strategies and techniques. The presentation begins in the High Gallery with an examination of the 1959 Antwerp exhibition *Vision in Motion—Motion in Vision*, which was a critical moment of discovery for the ZERO artists. From there the show unfolds roughly chronologically and features over 180 works in a range of mediums—painting, sculpture, works on paper, installations, and archival materials that include publications and filmic documentation. Among the central themes explored are the development of new definitions of painting, including the monochrome, serial structures, and pictures made with fire and smoke; a focus on light, movement and space; the interrogation of the relationship between nature, technology, and humankind; an interest in viewer activation; and the production of live art actions, many of which were known as demonstrations.

ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s includes artworks by Arman, Armando, Bernard Aubertin, Agostino Bonalumi, Robert Breer, Pol Bury, Enrico Castellani, Gianni Colombo, Dadamaino, Paul De Vree, Piero Dorazio, Lucio Fontana, Hermann Goepfert, Gerhard von Graevenitz, Gotthard Graubner, Jan Henderikse, Paul Van Hoeydonck, Oskar Holweck, Yves Klein, Yayoi Kusama, Walter Leblanc, Francesco Lo Savio, Adolf Luther, Heinz Mack, Piero Manzoni, Almir Mavignier, Christian Megert, Henk Peeters, Otto Piene, Uli Pohl, George Rickey, Dieter Roth, Hans Salentin, Jan Schoonhoven, Jesús Rafael Soto, Daniel Spoerri, Jean Tinguely, Günther Uecker, Jef Verheyen, and Nanda Vigo, and herman de vries.

Rejecting the then-dominant styles in European art, Tachisme and Art Informel, which emphasized gestural abstraction and personal expression, the emerging generation of ZERO artists devised new approaches to painting. They explored the use of single colors and serial structures to achieve a minimal aesthetic. Klein's *Monochromes* series proved influential. By limiting his palette to one color and applying dense layers of pigment in an all-over treatment, he downplayed the hand of the artist. Rather than focusing on the personal expression that was central to Art Informel, he pointed to painting's capacity to convey immaterial concepts like cosmic energy. Starting in the late 1950s, a number of ZERO artists also experimented with monochrome painting, developing distinctive interpretations and exploring parallel interests in light, structure, and new materials. Otto Piene used stencils to lay paint on canvas in grid-like patterns intended to emphasize the play of light. In a related approach, Brazilian artist Almir Mavignier created works with patterns of colored paint droplets with pointed tips. Heinz Mack applied serial lines to his paintings to generate a sensation of dynamism. Günther Uecker enlivened the surface of his monochromes with utilitarian materials like corks and nails, while Enrico Castellani used nails to create pictures that initially look like flat, single-color paintings, yet upon closer examination reveal themselves to be dimensional reliefs. Other members of the ZERO network also turned to everyday materials ranging from cotton threads to roof tiles. In his *Achromes* (1957–63), Piero Manzoni tested the limits of the medium by employing unusual, colorless materials like bread and Styrofoam.

The potential to create the optical impression of vibration through serial structures and grid formats was a source of great interest to ZERO artists, who explored both real and virtual movement in their works. Mack and Piene coedited three issues of a magazine titled *ZERO* (1958–61); the second volume included a frontispiece repeating the word *vibration*, the theme of that issue and a concept underlying much of the work made by artists in the network. As the exhibition demonstrates, many ZERO artists used motors to create kinetic artworks. A prime example is Uecker's remarkable *New York Dancer I* (1965). Reflecting the simultaneous influences of Sufi whirling and the energy of New York, the dynamic sculpture represents the stirring of the burgeoning youth movement in the 1960s and creates a cacophonous soundtrack as nails strike one another.

ZERO artists emerged from their individual experiences of World War II determined to embrace a positive approach to both art and life. In their hands, such ostensibly destructive acts as burning, cutting, and nailing became creative ones. Photographs and film footage (a selection of which are shown in the exhibition) capture these physical engagements, from Fontana slashing through canvas to Uecker shooting arrows into his pictures to Klein, Peeters, and Piene "painting" with fire and smoke. Action—and actively engaging the viewer—was also the key to a series of live events undertaken by ZERO artists. A notable example is *ZERO: Edition, Exposition, Demonstration*, held in and outside Düsseldorf's

Galerie Schmela in 1961 and conceived by Group Zero. The performative evening involved Günther Uecker marking a “Zero zone” with white paint, and other participants blowing bubbles and launching a balloon in the night sky. It unfolded around a large and enthusiastic crowd that included artists like Joseph Beuys and Nam June Paik.

Throughout the course of ZERO’s history, light, movement, and space remained central concerns. The artists broadened their work beyond painting and sculpture to include the creation of installations and explored unorthodox sites for showing art. By the early 1960s, artists in the ZERO network had begun wide-ranging experiments with innovative formats, materials, and techniques. They insisted on having total freedom to create art in new ways and show it in nontraditional exhibition spaces. This in part reflected a palpable excitement about new frontiers in the wake of the historic space exploration projects of the era. ZERO artists embraced the potential of space—in both its literal and conceptual senses—by filling whole galleries with their environmental works and turning to nature, specifically the desert and sky, as a viable site for art. The elements of air, earth, and fire figured prominently in many projects, and light continued to be an important subject and material. Piene used light and air to animate his sculptures of the period, while Uecker’s sand spirals, which were presented on the floor, brought nature into the space of culture. Mack’s Sahara Project (described in print in 1961) proposed the placement of works in the desert in order to facilitate various experiences and promote a heightened awareness of light and space. ZERO artists saw no contradiction in drawing on both nature and technology for materials and sources of inspiration in their efforts to call attention to the significance of light, movement, and space in contemporary society and culture.

Concluding the exhibition is *Lichtraum: Hommage à Fontana (Light Room: Homage to Fontana)*, an installation Group Zero presented at Documenta 3 (Kassel, West Germany) in 1964. This installation, which is being shown for the first time in the United States, includes a slide projection of a painting by Fontana; individual contributions by Mack, Piene, and Uecker; and, most importantly, the only two works made collaboratively by the trio. *Lichtraum* encapsulates the ZERO artists’ innovative approaches to light and movement and encourages experiential encounters rather than mere looking. It also reflects the network’s ambitions to foster connections among artists without obscuring individual authorship.

Exhibition Catalogue

A fully illustrated 244-page catalogue accompanies *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s*. The publication features a lead essay by exhibition curator Valerie Hillings, Curator and Manager, Curatorial Affairs, Abu Dhabi Project, Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, and contributions by Daniel Birnbaum, Director, Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Edouard Derom, Curatorial Assistant, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum; Johan Pas, Professor of Modern and Contemporary Art, Koninklijke Academie voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen; Dirk Pörschmann, Research Associate, ZERO foundation; and Margriet Schavemaker, Curator/Head of Research & Publications, Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. A hardcover edition priced at \$65 will be available at the museum shop and online at guggenheimstore.org and distributed in the United States through ARTBOOK | D.A.P.

Collaborative Research Project on the ZERO Network, 2011–14

Over the course of the last three years, a research project dedicated to the international ZERO network has been conducted by the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, the ZERO foundation,

Düsseldorf, and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam. The Guggenheim's exhibition and the exhibitions being organized by the ZERO foundation at the Martin-Gropius-Bau in Berlin and the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam each derive from that research project.

Education and Public Programs

Creamcheese

Saturday, November 15, 7:30 pm

ZERO scholar Tiziana Caianiello provides an introduction to the history of Creamcheese (1967–76), a psychedelic discotheque and artists' meeting place in Düsseldorf. Conceived by ZERO artist Günther Uecker and decorated by other network artists, including Adolf Luther, Heinz Mack, Gerhard Richter, and Daniel Spoerri, it became known for its progressive music and film programming as well as its synthesis of art, music, and performance. Creamcheese provides the inspiration for an event following Caianiello's talk developed by R. Luke Dubois and Zach Layton that features music by Genesis, Pink Floyd, Tangerine Dream, Supertramp, Frank Zappa, and others.

\$12, \$8 members, \$5 students

ZEROgraphy: Mapping the ZERO Network, 1957–67

Wednesday, January 7, 6:30 pm

Moderated by exhibition curator Valerie Hillings with an international panel of scholars and fellow members of the ZERO foundation Scientific Board, including Antoon Melissen, Francesca Pola, and Johan Pas, this program investigates the contexts in which artists associated with the international ZERO network emerged and operated—Belgium, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands—and the connections among them.

The Guggenheim is grateful for the research provided by the ZERO foundation.

\$12, \$8 members, free for students with RSVP

ZERO Film Program

Friday–Tuesday, October 10–January 6, daily at 3 pm

Screened in conjunction with the exhibition *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s*, this documentary film program provides an expanded view of the ZERO network and the artistic processes the artists employed. Screenings take place in the New Media Theater.

Free with admission. For the full schedule, visit guggenheim.org/filmscreenings.

Curator's Eye Tours

Fridays, 12 pm

Free with museum admission

October 24: Edouard Derom

November 14: Valerie Hillings

AZIMUT/H: *Continuity and Newness*

September 20, 2014–January 19, 2015

Peggy Guggenheim Collection

On view concurrently with *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s* is *AZIMUT/H: Continuity and Newness* at the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, which celebrates a related European avant-garde of the 1960s. The exhibition presents a study of the influential Milan gallery Azimut and the publication *Azimuth* founded in 1959 by Piero Manzoni and Enrico Castellani. Through Azimut (the gallery) and *Azimuth* (the publication), the artists formulated what they described as “a new concept of art” that thrived on the dialectic of “continuity and the new.” The presentation features the work of Manzoni and Castellani; other key protagonists of the period, including Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, and Günther Uecker of Group Zero; and ZERO network figures such as Dadamaino, Lucio Fontana, and Yves Klein. *AZIMUT/H: Continuity and Newness* is organized by Luca Massimo Barbero, Associate Curator, Peggy Guggenheim Collection. For more information, visit <http://www.guggenheim-venice.it/inglese/exhibitions/azimuth/azimut-h.html>.

About the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation

Founded in 1937, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation is dedicated to promoting the understanding and appreciation of art, primarily of the modern and contemporary periods, through exhibitions, education programs, research initiatives, and publications. The Guggenheim network that began in the 1970s when the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, was joined by the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, has since expanded to include the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao (opened 1997), and the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi (currently in development). Looking to the future, the Guggenheim Foundation continues to forge international collaborations that take contemporary art, architecture, and design beyond the walls of the museum, including with the Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative, and with The Robert H. N. Ho Family Foundation. More information about the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation can be found at guggenheim.org.

VISITOR INFORMATION

Admission: Adults \$22, students/seniors (65+) \$18, members and children under 12 free. Available with admission or by download to personal devices, the Guggenheim’s free [app](#) offers an enhanced visitor experience. The app features content on special exhibitions, access to more than 1,500 works in the Guggenheim’s permanent collection, and information about the museum’s landmark building. Verbal Imaging guides for select exhibitions are also included for visitors who are blind or have low vision. The Guggenheim app is supported by Bloomberg Philanthropies.

Museum Hours: Sunday–Wednesday, 10 am–5:45 pm; Friday, 10 am–5:45 pm; Saturday, 10 am–7:45 pm; closed Thursday. On Saturdays, beginning at 5:45 pm, the museum hosts “Pay What You Wish.” For general information, call 212 423 3500 or visit the museum online at: guggenheim.org
guggenheim.org/connect

For publicity images visit guggenheim.org/pressimages.

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