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Battaglia, Andy. "From Zero to Hero: After Six Decades of Remaking Art, Heinz Mack Keeps on Dreaming." *www.artnews.com (ARTnews)*, 21 March 2017.

ARTNEWS



Installation view of Heinz Mack's 2017 solo exhibition, at Sperone Westwater. All photos COURTESY THE ARTIST AND SPERONE WESTWATER, NEW YORK

The first artwork in the latest gallery show of Heinz Mack—catalytic cofounder of the Zero group in the late 1950s and a firebrand ever since—is a systematic explosion of color. Large in scale on a canvas measuring nearly 12 by 20 feet, it's a painting of multihued bands sequenced in a spectrum-like pattern and mixed with impulses toward mysticism and analysis, experimentation and organization. The effect of it is both heady and sublime—like a response to questions that are searching and cerebral but also very simple in the end.

The work—*The Garden of Eden (Chromatic Constellation)*, 2011—is one of 35 on view at Sperone Westwater gallery in New York, where three floors are given over to Mack's activities from 1958 to 2016. Painting and sculpture predominate, but archival films feature the artist waxing philosophical on his practice in a studio filled with unorthodox materials and, in a vintage broadcast titled *Tele-Mack* from 1969, patrolling the Tunisian desert alone in a silver suit. Somewhere between the two stations lies Mack's ideological home.

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A few weeks ago at the gallery, where his show is on view through March 25, Mack held forth in conversation that careened between the beginning and the end of Zero, the philosophical thoughts of Seneca, recurring patterns in the “microcosmos,” and an enduring restlessness that has driven his art from the start. The ten-year prime of Zero—a movement he founded with Gunther Uecker and Otto Piene, and whose unofficial ranks included others like Lucio Fontana, Jean Tinguely, and Yves Klein—remains integral to Mack as an early point of resolution and, later, departure as well.

“There was a crisis in 1957,” Mack said of the starting point for the group, conceived in the remnants of postwar Germany and named in reference to the final countdown of a rocket blasting off. “Whatever I had done before, starting as a student and on into art informel, all of the sudden didn’t work. It was a reflection of what had been done already by other artists, and that’s what I wanted to avoid.”



Heinz Mack in the Tunisian desert for *Tele-Mack*.

Works from that early period feature in the gallery show, including white-ish patterned paintings on cardboard, burlap, and wood as well as metal sculptures that rise from the floor in towering shapes that play with the shine and reflection of light. But even the future had to end. “I felt it had been done and could not go on in a creative way,” Mack said of Zero phasing out for him after a decade of frantic action. “It could be a danger that I would repeat everything, and this system of repeating, repeating, repeating means it will die.”



Heinz Mack, *Fächer-Flügel (Fan-Wing)*, 1964/1976.

He continued, existentially: “Each artist is a lonely man, and he has to go his own way. It’s kind of like going through the desert: there’s no sign telling you go in one direction or in another. You are completely free.”

In the desert, he made a prescient foray into elements that would be integral to Land Art, with works including large areas of mystifying lines raked in sand and sculptures that would grow or recede in size depending on conditions. “I wondered what would happen if I placed a structure of mine into that space,” Mack said. “It was a strange experience: a small piece from a distance would disappear, and if you started to approach, it became bigger and bigger. If the light was really catching it in full power, then it would explode and become completely immaterial. It was a kind of material apparition.”

Fleeting qualities of light figure into certain sculptures in the Sperone Westwater show, including spires made of aluminum, glass, and stainless steel. But as an element crucial to his conception of color, Mack said, light is present no matter the medium.

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“Light is mysterious,” the artist said, “but from the beginning I avoided getting involved in mythology. I’m not a dreamer.” Really? Heinz Mack is not a dreamer?! “Of course I’m a dreamer,” he laughed. “But one has to get a very clear consciousness after dreaming—otherwise, you won’t be able to report your dreams.” In any case: “colors are transformed light,” he said. “You cannot separate light and color.”



Christo, Angela Westwater, and Heinz Mack, in 2017.

Christo, a friend of Mack’s going back to a first meeting in Europe in the early ’60s, was pleased to reacquaint in New York. On the phone from his studio, after seeing Mack again at his opening, Christo said of his compatriot in terms of playing with color and form, “Heinz has always been very involved with the relation between surfaces and materials—interaction. This is very special to his work: new discovery in materials and connecting elements.”

About his initial meetings with Mack in an artistic milieu including core Zero members as well as John Cage, Karlheinz Stockhausen, Mary Bauermeister, and Nam June Paik, he added, “It was a very lively situation!”

Remnants of those memories remain in material form. “I actually exchanged with him, so I have an early work in aluminum from 1962 or ’63,” Christo said. “As young artists, we were always trading.”

Asked what connects the Heinz Mack of then to the Heinz Mack of now, many decades later but still thrumming at the age of 86, Christo said, “He is very energetic, very vivacious—even today.”