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# Art

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## "ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s"

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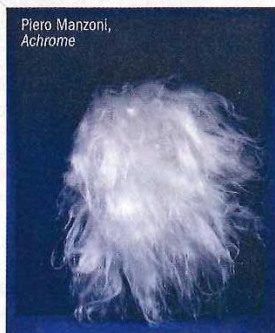
Although it often seems dated, the work of the ZERO group contains a few discoveries. By **Anne Doran**

★★★

**Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum,**  
 through Jan 7 (see Museums)

It's often the case that the most self-consciously futuristic art of its time seems the most dated in retrospect. So it is with the ZERO group, a movement founded in Düsseldorf in 1957 by German artists Otto Piene and Heinz Mack and later expanded to include Günther Uecker. Like a lot of European artists during the period, they were reacting against Tachism and Expressionism, combining utopian and spiritual aspirations with a faith in modern materials and technology to find their language in light, space, color and motion.

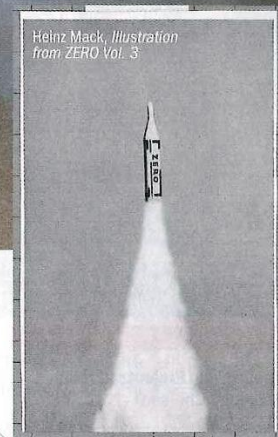
This flawlessly researched exhibition traces the connections between these artists and their counterparts in France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, the United States and Japan, making the case that they anticipated conceptual, performance and land art.



Piero Manzoni,  
*Achrome*

Unfortunately, much of the art produced by the group and its global peers—the so-called ZERO network—looks homogenous, undemanding and decorator-friendly when seen without the happenings, evening exhibitions, lectures and light shows described in curator Valerie Hillings's catalog essay.

The most notable exceptions are by better-known artists, such as a kinetic sculpture by Nouveaux Réalistes Yves Klein and Jean Tinguely, featuring a spinning ultramarine disc, and a frame filled with toxic cobalt chloride crystals by Piero Manzoni, the cofounder of Milan's Azimut Gallery. Still, Piene's mechanized artworks, which send sparks of light and amorphous shadows chasing



Heinz Mack, *Illustration from ZERO Vol. 3*

across the walls, is a revelation, as are Mack's 1960s sculptural interventions in the Tunisian desert. (Speaking of the latter, Sperone Westwater offers a comprehensive look at Mack's work, running concurrently with the Guggenheim exhibition; his sci-fi photos from the 1960s are worth the visit alone.) In the end, "ZERO" reveals the sort of loose threads and passing alliances usually weeded out by history, providing a fuller picture of midcentury hopes and dreams.

**THE BOTTOM LINE** The Gugg goes back to the future.

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