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Mack, Heinz, and Julian Elias Bronner. "500 Words." *www.artforum.com (Artforum)*, 5 December 2014.

ARTFORUM



Left: Heinz Mack, *New York, New York*, 1963, aluminum on wood, 62 x 39 x 7". Right: Heinz Mack, *Tele-Mack*, 1968, 16-mm film transferred to DVD, color, sound, 24 minutes 35 seconds.

Heinz Mack is an artist who primarily works with light and is a cofounder of the international artists' network ZERO. Mack speaks here about the so-called Sahara Project, a series of installations he made in the Tunisian desert from 1962 to 1976. The project is featured in the exhibition "ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s," at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, until January 7, 2015. Mack's concurrent solo exhibition, "From ZERO to Today: Heinz Mack, 1955–2014," also runs at New York's Sperone Westwater Gallery until December 13, 2014.

When I was in New York in 1963, I was searching for new materials, hoping they would give birth to ideas. I received a tip from Nam June Paik, who told me to look at one of these appliance wholesale stores on the Bowery where I could find something for very little money. What I chanced upon there was an aluminum honeycomb material that is patented and produced by a company in California—a material I had never encountered before in Germany. It was malleable, and by stretching it I realized that its structure was quite similar to structures in nature. For example, when you look at a leaf through a microscope, you notice that

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the organic matter is arranged in a way that gives stability to the entire surface. I later learned that the stable and light material I found on the Bowery was also used to fabricate airplanes, rockets, and military vessels. Many things we discover in nature are converted into industrial forms, and I find the interaction between the two striking.

I grew up in the countryside, which was rich in farmers' fields and surrounded by forests. The farmers created artificial surfaces on their fields by making grooves with the plow. I was impressed by these fields' high, golden grain, blown by the wind so their surface mirrored the waves of the sea. I had a similar sensation later in my life while in the Sahara desert—the sand dunes took on the form of an endless, radiant ocean. I began to conceptualize the Sahara Project in 1959 and went to Tunisia in 1962. I dismantled some mirrors in my hotel's bathroom there and placed them into the sand in a line so that the reflection of the sunset hit them directly. The intention of this work was to create new sensations of beauty there and to experiment with the appearance of light, which at a distance appeared like a mirage. This was documented in my 1968 film *Tele-Mack* and in photographs taken of the work by Thomas Hoepker in 1976. Afterward, we published the book *Sculpture Safari: Photographic Interpretation of Artifacts in Nature* with Rizzoli in 1977.

I am mostly impressed but sometimes depressed by technology. What does it mean to be impressed by a branch of knowledge that has been used as an instrument to systematically kill people and nature? Developing and mastering technology is one of man's finest abilities—it's in his constructive spirit. However, the dialectical irony is that technology is also always capable of destroying humanity. I'm reminded of Goethe's poem "The Sorcerer's Apprentice," which argues that as soon as you start to learn a technique, it captivates you, rules you, and autonomy is lost. You become dependent on it. It has to be a conscious decision to remain as free as possible. With reservation and intelligence, humanity can remain at a critical distance and optimize technology for the future.

— *As told to Julian Elias Bronner*