

Exhibition

# Far from Emptiness. ZERO and Post-war Art in Europe

29 Sep. 2022 — 12 Feb. 2023



Equipo 57, *PA 8*, 1960. IVAM Institut Valencià  
d'Art Modern, Generalitat

Press Dossier  
Institut Valencià d'Art Modern

IVAM

Exhibition

# Far from Emptiness. ZERO and Post-war Art in Europe

29 Sep. 2022 — 12 Feb. 2023

Curator: Bartomeu Marí



GENERALITAT  
VALENCIANA

TOTS  
A UNA  
veu

IVAM

Sponsor



# Far from Emptiness. ZERO and Post-war Art in Europe

After World War Two, the whole of Europe was in a state of shock from which it gradually emerged in the course of the 1950s. Various artists working in cities like Düsseldorf, Antwerp, Milan, Amsterdam, Paris and Zagreb, aesthetically and ideologically distant from the reigning expressionism, started to gather in groups and collectives to rethink the forms of art. *Far from Emptiness. ZERO and Post-war Art in Europe* reviews the principal movements that arose in Europe between 1957 and 1966, taking as its referent the ZERO group, formed by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Gunter Uecker. This and other collectives, including the Spanish Equipo 57, linked their work to magazines and publications, actions and events.

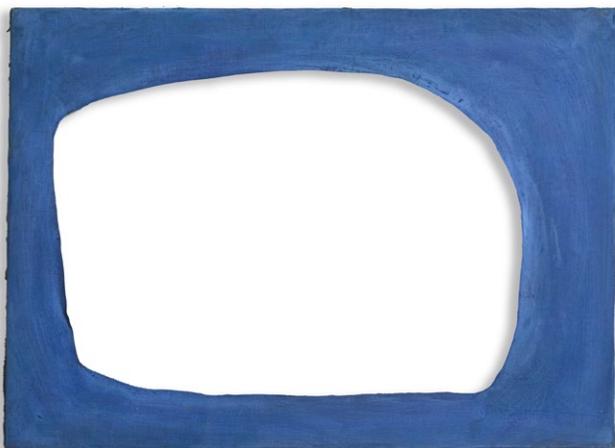
The artists connected with ZERO shared a series of ideas and principles that united them beyond stylistic, material or programmatic divergences. They sought to create “ecstasy through colour” and tried to make painting “vibrate” by and in itself. They treated light as a raw material and introduced movement as a natural condition of their works. They opposed the excess of expressive gesture with creative strategies that recall scientific research or alchemy. Following the experiments with light and engineering initiated by Moholy-Nagy or the Russian Constructivists, they brought the practice of avant-garde art close to an enthusiasm for science as the engine of human progress.

The show, which begins with the appearance of the *Abendausstellungen* (single-evening exhibitions) in 1957 and concludes with the decision of Heinz Mack and Gunter Uecker to dissolve the ZERO group in 1966, brings together 175 exhibits, including paintings, sculptures, documents and films. The works are organised around the specific art scenes of Central European cities, each one a forum that agglutinated artists connected in large international networks of complicity that gave rise to exhibitions, events, publications, ideas and key debates in the heady decade of the 1960s.

The exhibition includes works from the IVAM collection and from museums, galleries and art centres like Zero Foundation, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Kunst Palast (Düsseldorf), Steidelijk Museum (Amsterdam), The Mayor Gallery (London), Museum Tinguely, Centro Andaluz de Arte Contemporáneo (Seville), Museum Morsbroich (Leverkusen), the Archivio Nanda Vigo, A Arte Invernizzi, the Fondazione Enrico Castellani, the Fondazione Piero Manzoni and the Galleria Allegra Ravizza.

## ROOM 1

Once the reconstruction of infrastructures and cities had begun in Central Europe in the 1950s, there emerged a large number of groups of artists, intellectuals and avant-garde activists. In Düsseldorf, Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, who were soon joined by Gunter Rambow, decided in 1957 to start organising their own exhibitions and to publish the magazine *Zero*, whose first issue came out in 1958. Their aesthetic stance situated them at the antipodes of the dominant artistic modes of the time, the existentialist and gestural Expressionism, Tachism and material Informalism. Theirs was an art of restraint tending towards the geometric, the monochrome and the serial, from which authorly traces were absent. In Milan, Piero Manzoni and Enrico Castellani formed the Azimut gallery and published the magazine *Azimuth* in 1959. That same year, artists converted into exhibition organisers gathered around the show *Vision in Motion. Motion in Vision* in Antwerp. In Amsterdam, Dutch artists formed the group Nul [zero in Dutch] and persuaded the director of the Stedelijk Museum to organise exhibitions whose repercussions were considerable. With the Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp axis, the Low Countries became a key scenario. More or less organised groups or associations of



Dadamaino, *Volumen*, 1958.  
The Mayor Gallery



Lucio Fontana, *Crucifixion, spatial concept*, 1959. IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat

artists with complementary ideas also appeared in Paris (Nouveaux Réalistes, GRAV), and in Zagreb, the exhibition *Nove Tendencje*, a forum generating some of the most important aesthetic and political debates of the time, was held every two years from 1961 to 1965.

Among the strategies perfected by these artists were collaborative creation, the involvement of the public, self-publishing, the figure of the artist as curator and organiser of exhibitions and events, the development of critical discourses and the management of aesthetic debates. They enthusiastically introduced important mutations to the concept of art at a moment of great social and political effervescence. The blossoming of Pop Art in the mid-1960s and the accelerated succession of artistic and media movements distracted from the impact caused by these artists, who decided to paint with fire, treated light as material, tried to make painting

vibrate, introduced mechanical (kinetic art) and illusory (op art) motion, preached monochromy, automatism and seriality, and produced the first experiments in computer art. All of them admired Lucio Fontana, whom they regarded as a spiritual father and the true creator of a new space for art.

## ROOM 2

Anxious to make a place for themselves in the artistic circles of the time, dominated by painting along Expressionist, Tachist and Informalist lines, the young artists Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, who had their studios in the same building in the centre of Düsseldorf, decided to turn their working spaces into exhibition galleries. The *Abendausstellungen* were exhibitions that lasted only for the evening of their inauguration. For the seventh of them, held on 24 April 1958, issue number 1 of the magazine ZERO was



Günther Uecker, *Tisch*, 1964.  
Kunstpalast. © Günther Uecker,  
VEGAP, Valencia 2022



Piero Manzoni, *Sewn cloth*, 1961-62.  
Fondazione Piero Manzoni

published, dedicated to painting in the colour red. The second issue of the magazine, dedicated to vibration, was published on 2 October that same year on the occasion of the eighth “evening exhibition”. The magazine had an “apotheosis” in its third and final issue, which appeared in July 1961.

On 3 September 1959, the first issue of the magazine *Azimuth* appeared in Milan. Its masterminds, Piero Manzoni and Enrico Castellani, also organised the programme of exhibitions at the Azimut gallery, which succeeded one another at a frenzied rate. Somewhat younger artists founded the Gruppo T in Milan and the Gruppo N in Padua in October and November that year. The Italian scene was highly multidisciplinary, embracing art, experimental literature, design, architecture, music and avant-garde thought. *Azimuth*, whose second and final issue appeared on 4 January 1960 on the occasion of the exhibition *La Nuova Conzezione Artistica* at the Galleria Azimut, had an undoubted influence on the artistic circles of the time despite its short life.

## ROOM 3

Between 1961 and 1966, the Dutch artists Armando, Jan Henderikse, Henk Peeters and Jan Schoonhoven formed the group Nul [zero in Dutch], although they had exhibited together since 1958 under the name of the Dutch Informal Group. In 1962, Henk Peeters organised the exhibition *Nul* at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, which included artists related to the movement in France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and Belgium. Apart from other exhibitions they took part in, the artists centred on Nul also organised the famous show *nul negentienhonderd vijf en zestig* [zero nineteen hundred and sixty-five] at the same gallery in 1965. Besides European artists, this exhibition also included artists from the Japanese Gutai group. In Belgium, without forming a group as such, the artists Jef Verheyen, Pol Bury and Walter Leblanc organised exhibitions like the famous *Vision in Motion. Motion in Vision* at the G58 Hessenhuis, an industrial locale in the port of Antwerp, in 1959.



Yves Klein, *Cosmogony (COS 43)*, from the series *Antropometries*, 1960. IVAM Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Generalitat

Jean Tinguely and Yves Klein were two of the most active artists, and they initially involved themselves in many exhibitions and activities that helped to interconnect avant-garde artists and groups of the time. Tinguely explicitly introduced movement to his mechanised sculptures, while Klein fascinated his contemporaries with the development of monochrome painting, which became a particularly widespread leitmotif. In 1960, together with the French art critic Pierre Restany, Klein founded the Nouveaux Réalistes group, whose manifesto was also signed by artists like Jean Tinguely and Daniel Spoerri.



Heinz Mack, *¿Siebst du den Wind? gruss an Tinguely*, 1962. ZERO foundation. Donation Heinz Mack. © Heinz Mack, VEGAP, Valencia, 2022



Daniel Spoerri, *Trap painting*, 1970. Kunstpalast

## ROOM 4

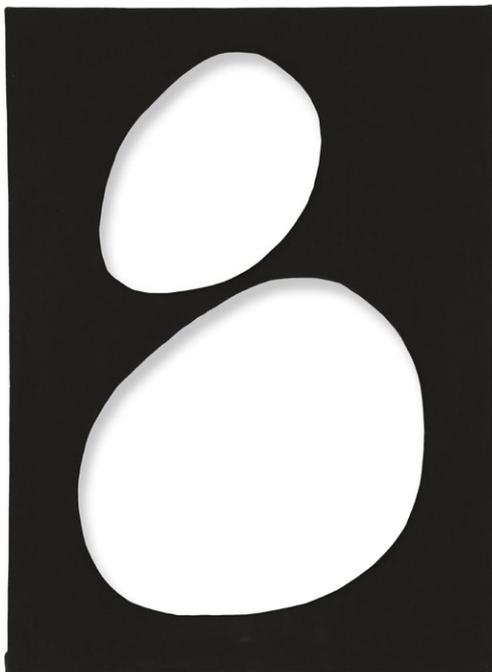
The members of Equipo 57 (Jorge Oteiza, Luis Aguilera, Ángel Duarte, José Duarte, Juan Serrano and Agustín Ibarrola) were some of the few Spanish artists who took part in various exhibitions related to the new artistic tendency. Like Francisco Sobrino, a founder member of the Groupe de Recherche et Action Visuelle (GRAV), Equipo 57 was active in Paris. Its aesthetic proposals merged perfectly with the debates of the time, and from the political point of view, its members were aligned with the most committed sector, proposing collective creation and the application of beauty to everyday objects in the same way as contemporary Italian artists like Bruno Munari and Enzo Mari.

From 1959 onwards, young artists in Italy undertook a series of aesthetic and conceptual explorations that led them from the intersection of art and architecture to investigation on space, time, movement and digital technology (then nascent), creating what today we call “immersive installations”. The members of the



Grazia Varisco, *Magnetic table with linear elements 5B 5N*, 1959. The Mayor Gallery

Gruppo T and the Gruppo N participated in debates centred on the artist-work and art-society relationship, especially those which took place at the biennial *Nove Tendenze* shows in Zagreb (1961-1965). The *Arte Programmata* exhibition (1962), held under the patronage of the Olivetti company, was a milestone in the history of electronic art and participative proposals that is still little known and studied.



Dadamaino, *Volumen*, 1958.  
Private collection.  
Courtesy of A Arte Invernizzi



Gianni Colombo, *Strutturazione fluida*, 1960. Private collection.  
Courtesy of A Arte Invernizzi

## ROOM 5

It was the Italian artist Piero Dorazio who first took the ideas and proposals of the new European art to the United States. After World War Two, New York became the capital of contemporary art, and its attraction was felt by the artists close to the European avant-gardes of the time. Although it was American Pop Art that met with dazzling success when it reached Europe in the early 1960s, several exhibitions also took the new European art to the western side of the Atlantic. The largest of these was held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1965 under the title *The Responsive Eye*, and was centred on the production of motion in painting through optical effects. Brian de Palma's documentary brilliantly reflects the aesthetic, critical and social atmosphere at the American institution which was to create and manage the western artistic canon up to the present day.

Artists like Hans Haacke and Otto Piene took up residence in the United States. Piene combined his artistic practice with his teaching at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology. His work continued with the exploration of movement and light, as well as inflatable structures and sky art.



Christian Megert, *Untitled (Object of broken pieces)*, 1962. The Mayor Gallery. © Christian Megert, VEGAP, Valencia, 2022



Otto Piene, *Flower*, 1967. The Mayor Gallery. © Otto Piene, VEGAP, Valencia, 2022

In the early 1970s, Heinz Mack gained awareness of the historic dimension of ZERO and made the graphics displayed in this last room as the conclusion to a moment of special effervescence in European art. It was not until well into the 21st century that major museums on both sides of the Atlantic decided to make a critical review of the contribution of a generation of artists who, having lived through the war as children, tried to distance themselves from emptiness in order to propose

## ACTIVITIES

**Presentation of the exhibition by the director of the IVAM, Nuria Enguita, and the curator, Bartomeu Marí**

Date: 28 September 2022, 7 pm  
Place: Auditorium

**Narratives and artistic perspectives of post-war Europe**

In this activity, students will take part during their visit to the exhibition in a critical review of contemporary artistic production, connecting it with today's social welfare situation through conscious positioning, performance and humour, all on the basis of key works in the exhibition.

Aimed at: Secondary and high school students and other groups.  
Date: consult the IVAM website

**Lecture by Marco Meneguzzo**

Date: 25 January 2023

## PUBLICATION

The catalogue accompanying the exhibition is conceived as a compilation of texts by artists involved in the exhibitions and debates, illustrated with the works in the exhibition and a wide selection of documents, graphic material and images from the main exhibitions related to the different groups around ZERO. Most of these texts have been translated here for the first time. Also included is the most extensive commented chronology published to date on related actions and activities between 1957 and 1966. With prevalence given to original sources, the catalogue contains an essay by Bartomeu Marí, curator of the exhibition, and an introduction by Nuria Enguita, director of the IVAM.

Institut Valencià d'Art Modern  
Centre Julio González  
Guillem de Castro, 118  
46003 València

Contact:  
Department of Communication  
comunicacion@ivam.es  
T. +34 963 176 600

**IVAM**