ALMINE RECH

Heinz Mack
From ZERO until Today

May 9 — Jun 14, 2025 | New York

Almine Rech New York, Tribeca is pleased to present 'Heinz Mack | From ZERO until Today,' Heinz Mack's first solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from May 9 to June 14, 2025.

Heinz Mack has focused on the aesthetic possibilities of vibration and luminosity since the beginning of his career in the late 1950s as co-founder of the global ZERO movement with fellow artist and philosophy student Otto Piene. Light in Mack's work suggests both the solar light of the sun and the chemical light of the mushroom cloud. In Mack's work, brightness is not only a natural phenomenon but also, emerging in the wake of two world wars and under the shadow of the threat of nuclear conflict, his work suggests the interrelation of the duality of life and death. These twin poles of human experience are also captured in the ZERO group's manifesto-like writings, which convey an interest in new possibilities, as suggested by the word "zero" itself, which ZERO's practitioners dramatically likened to the culmination of a rocket launch countdown.

Though based in Düsseldorf, ZERO was a loose allegiance of artists working internationally, engaging with figures as diverse as Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, and Yayoi Kusama. While involving optical, kinetic, and installation art from the start, many of the ZERO artists were among the pioneers reanimating the historical avant-garde trope of monochrome painting in the postwar period. Mack was one of these. In keeping with his generation's use of single-color painting to isolate a particular formal effect, Mack turned to the monochrome early in his career as a device to set off vibratory effects, which in turn suggested a way to harness light. In the dynamic structures Mack began making in 1955 he realized that, in creating a subtly variegated topography within a field of a single color, he could elucidate luminous effects through the changing way light hits different passages across a painting's varied topography. For example, in *Ohne Titel* (1958) Mack incised a grid of linear striations into red synthetic resin, and did the same with white resin in *White Silence* (1960). Works like these activate the viewer, since the quality of effects change as one moves around the painting's heterogeneous surface.

Embracing the numinous qualities of light, Mack introduced metallics into his practice, such as the silver resin used to create the choppy surface of *Vibration der Schatten* (1958). Mack followed his friend Yves Klein, who called himself the painter of blue, by fashioning himself the painter of silver. This inevitably suggested to Mack that he could work with actual metals, as in *Vibration* (1959), where the artist hand embossed an aluminum panel. These reliefs encourage even further the play of light introduced in the dynamic structures, as it radiates off Mack's worked metallic surfaces. From there, Mack progressed into fully three-dimensional works, which occupy the space shared with the viewer, as in the free-standing aluminum folding screen *Ohne Titel* (1972). Mack did not feel limited to only pursuing one idea at a time, or that he had to retire a particular way of working. As such, he would periodically return to certain formats, such as the metal reliefs, a recent example of which is *Ohne Titel* (2022), which uses an "x" motif to animate an aluminum surface, differing from, but operating similarly to, the textured fan-like composition found in the 1972 screen.

Another development was into kinetic work, such as *Japanische Trias* (1970), which Mack made during the year he was a guest professor at Osaka University in Japan. Here Mack transposed his signature textured surfaces onto rotating discs, which further activate a changeable dance of luminous effects. This ballet of light is extended in a recent kinetic sculpture, *Immaterial Erscheinung* (2022), which presents the ghostlike play of a glowing transparent sphere floating in front of a cube.

Other recent work demonstrates Mack's ongoing interest in environmental works, where the viewer occupies the dramatic space of a darkened room saturated with light effects. These are also conveyed in paintings, like *Night View* (2005) where phases reminiscent of a lunar eclipse are captured on a canvas surface. Fully dimensional sculptures such as *Netz-Stele* (2004) bring metallized light effects fully into the round.

More recently Mack has developed painterly ways of exploring light through compositions that juxtapose prismatic fields and lines of color. These works reference art history, harking back to Orphists like Sonia and Robert Delaunay, who pushed toward abstraction with their dynamic rainbow color spectrums. The bright speeding color vectors in Mack's recent paintings reference the ambient bouncing light rays activated by his earlier work. For example, *Chromatische Composition* (2022) contains a shimmering Paul Klee-like tessellation of pastel-hued color bars. Other works in the *Chromatische Konstellation* series take differing approaches, as in a 2013 work, where lines of color zig and zag across an atmospheric blue ground, while in a 2022 work a grid of white squares animate geometric color blocked passages. These recent works demonstrate that Mack is far from done with his now seven-decade-long exploration of vibration and light's endless possibilities and the multifaceted readings they provoke.

— Alex Bacon, Visiting Scholar, Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland.