ALMINE RECH

Zio Ziegler
Six Trees

Dec 22, 2025 — Feb 1, 2026 | Gstaad

Almine Rech Gstaad is pleased to present *Six Trees*, Zio Ziegler's third solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from December 22, 2025 to February 1, 2026.

If there is one 20th-century avant-garde artist who not only attempted but also succeeded—groundbreakingly so—in demonstrating the radical interrelation between spirituality, nature, and the uniquely human ability to recognize, appreciate, and distill universal harmony into a simplified visual code, that artist was Piet Mondrian. Although he began with a figurative approach under the influence of the Barbizon school, he soon abandoned realism and moved rapidly from figurative Cubism to abstraction.

It was after a trip to Idaho that Bay Area–based artist Zio Ziegler experienced an epiphany. "A few summers ago," he recalls, "I was on a river and started looking at all these burned-out husks of trees. A big fire had gone through the region." Seeing these trees reduced to minimalist and essential forms—transformed by natural catastrophe into abstract *memento mori*—brought Ziegler's visual memory back to Mondrian and his iconic tree paintings.

Mondrian had been able to smoothly shift from painting figurative landscapes to reducing the image of a tree to its fundamental components, and ultimately into abstract grids. In 1914, still early in the philosophical journey that would lead him to theorize Neo-Plasticism, he wrote:

"I construct lines and color combinations on a flat surface in order to express general beauty with the utmost awareness. Nature (or, that which I see) inspires me, puts me, as with any painter, in an emotional state so that an urge comes about to make something. But I want to come as close as possible to the truth and abstract everything from that, until I reach the foundation (still just an external foundation!) of things."
(Mondrian, letter to H.P. Bremmer, 1914)

Over a century later, Zio Ziegler is walking a comparable, though highly personal, spiritual arc. His artistic and existential quest revolves around what is essential—in life and in art. "I think there's a foundational code which we can learn from nature," he explains. "Your job as an artist is to build a keyboard of foundational references to shortcut your process in order to achieve a better notion of self-reflection."

In the pivotal moment of human history we now inhabit—marked by instant and constant access to overwhelming and overlapping information, driven by high-speed digital technology, virtuality, and above all, artificial intelligence—Ziegler's motivation is to get as close as possible to the true essence of life. He does so through relentless experimentation and an intuitive, day-by-day practice rooted in humility. Rather than rely on safe, repeatable formulas, he prefers to take risks and keep pushing his work forward.

Drawing from a wide range of visual languages— prehistoric and ancient art, classicism, Cubism, Futurism—Ziegler has, over the past decade, been pulling motifs and ideas from all periods of art history with a desire to bridge past and present. But this process is far from a mere intuitive artistic appropriation or a sophisticated form of postmodern anthropophagy. His approach is better described as a kind of eclectic and joyful experimentation with the core building blocks of human culture. In this sense, his work seeks to create something authentically—and even old-fashionedly—human. "I think that ultimately, the only thing that gets passed forward is the things that are necessary," he says.

Ziegler's art is grounded in a deep emotional encounter with nature and beauty—an approach he shares with Mondrian and many other artists he has studied and admires, from Botticelli and Caravaggio to Caillebotte and Freud. He draws from these predecessors not for stylistic *pastiche*, but to access a core visual and emotional code that transcends time and geography. His work reflects a polyphonic curiosity, integrating diverse cultural sources into a personal *musée imaginaire*, where unexpected associations give new meaning to human symbology and visual languages.

Expressed through a rich vocabulary of form and color, his paintings offer a non-linear, transhistorical vision of knowledge and representation. "Painting is my attempt at processing and synthesizing the stories and information I've become curious about," Ziegler explains. "Human beings advance by looking at things from different perspectives and by changing the way in which they look at themselves."

There could hardly be a more fitting place than Gstaad to host this exhibition, which also marks Ziegler's first solo show in Switzerland. The Saanenland is a mystic place, charged with energy—where nature and society, tradition and innovation, coexist, often in paradoxical ways. For Ziegler, this juxtaposition of opposites is familiar: he teaches design at Stanford, in the heart of Silicon Valley, yet lives and works in Mill Valley, California, riding his bike almost daily on Mount Tamalpais—a mountain once inhabited by Native American tribes.

The artworks on view were created in the raw, elemental encounter between pigment, matter, and movement. They radiate a tangible energy and possess a densely physical presence that invites a grounded, even mindful engagement. Ziegler, who practices somatic meditation, often sketches visions that emerge from his sessions, integrating them directly into his painting process.

For the six large-scale canvases in the exhibition, he employed a deliberately reduced set of tools. Working directly on raw canvas laid flat on the ground, he first primed each surface, then applied black, white, grey, and earth-toned pigments using oil sticks, palette knives, and brushes. This disciplined, essentialist approach brings him closer to the act of painting itself—stripping away excess in pursuit of something elemental.

In the face of a cultural shift—from a civilization-based model of human evolution to one increasingly defined by biology and technology, accelerated by the rise of artificial intelligence—Ziegler's tree paintings assert a different kind of knowing. They appeal first to the body, before engaging the intellect. This primacy of embodied perception remains a uniquely human capacity—one no machine can replicate.

Ziegler's artistic journey seems to aim at liberating both himself and his viewers from structural constraints that obscure the path to awareness, self-reflection, and understanding. "I paint how I feel, not how I see," he says. "My work is not about a final product, but about the process that helps me solve a problem."

There is beauty in simplicity. To grasp the essence of life, one must strip away all that is impermanent—form, color, noise, even emotion—until only the fundamental relationships remain. Ziegler's tree paintings command our attention because they are familiar, yet essential. They speak through the "keyboard of foundational references" he describes. As a result, they hold the viewer just long enough to shift perception. And if we look long enough, we may begin to look differently at ourselves.

— Valentina Locatelli, Writer and Curator