ALMINE RECH

# Zio Ziegler
# The Tesseract

## Sep 16 — Oct 21, 2026 | New York

**Almine Rech New York is pleased to present 'The Tesseract', Zio Ziegler's fourth solo exhibition with the gallery, on view from September 16 - October 21, 2026.**

Like Foucault's pendulum, which moves in an ellipse as it oscillates between its outer limits, Zio Ziegler's 'The Tesseract' swings the viewer in whirling, elliptical fashion from one aesthetic mode to another. From the thickly patterned world of his monumental and maximalist pictures, to the exploratory mark making of his skeletal monochrome canvases. And from the visceral and layered forms of his so-called "Essential Figures," to his similarly totemic three-dimensional figures whose dynamism he has stilled in bronze. Four modes, four artistic voices, four variations on a theme, each one giving rise to— yet also putting a kind of gravitational pressure on—the next.

What holds the center in Ziegler's vibrant pictorial system, however, is not a single point but a space laden with enduring possibility. It is a window through which we look out onto an unnamed future, from a present reality that is (as he declares) "far too dense for any single voice to hold." In the dynamic, even combustible, interplay between these four opposing aesthetic structures, Ziegler seeks to spark a new way of thinking. Resisting the homogenizing consensus that AI systems seem hellbent on producing among their human users, Ziegler suggests that we need a diverse visual language for self-reflection, as we continue to reckon with new intelligences we have built but have yet to understand.

Language, myth, and symbol are at the heart of 'The Tesseract'. Ziegler conceived of the series after reading several of humanity's oldest narratives: Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the Epic of Gilgamesh, and the Bible. Like his textual influences, which Ziegler sometimes quite literally registers in his pictures (he calls his maximalist paintings "illuminated manuscripts"), his library of art historical influences is also voluminous. Throughout we find the cowering figures of Adam and Eve from Masaccio's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*, the slumped contrapposto of Christ in Rubens's *Descent from the Cross*, and the ring-like rainbows of Memling's *Last Judgment*. So, too, do we see reverberations of the totemic forms of Picasso's cubist paintings, the swirling gestures and thick webs of Jackson Pollock's post-atomic pictures that teeter between precise control and chaotic uncontrol, the symbolic systems of Jasper Johns's number paintings, and the play between mark-making and erasure in Rauschenberg's *Erased de Kooning Drawing*. His monochrome abstractions suggest another precedent for harnessing the mythic in paint, inspired, in part, by black- and red-figure pottery of the ancient Mediterranean, whose makers, Ziegler says, distilled epic history into "linear allegory."

By considering historical religious image-cultures alongside modern traditions of image-making, Ziegler is undaunted by the suspicion toward the religious that prevails in contemporary art. In his use of religious subject matter, Ziegler circumvents questions of belief or unbelief, and points instead to the possibilities of images to kindle the senses, awaken subjectivity, and spur feeling. It's perhaps not coincidental, then, that he should call these pictures "relics" for the way they provoke the nervous system, not simply the intellect. Whether the dense patterns of his maximalist representational works or the impulsive marks across his more abstract pictures, we find bodies and surfaces teeming with energy. As these frenetic patterns quicken our gaze, they also invite us into an opportunity for communion, not least because of the duration they require: we must stand before them for long periods to fully survey and grasp their brimming visual fields.

Religious myths also appeal to Ziegler for the ways they endure even through periods of civilizational collapse—an endurance borne, in part, out of their continual tellings and retellings, as they move down through time and travel between linguistic and societal contexts. Ziegler gives shape to this phenomenon of translation, iteration, and reinscription at the very level of his artistic practice, often working non-linearly between canvases, and between one aesthetic mode and another. The iconography of the crucifixion, for example, reverberates not only in his "illuminated manuscript" pictures but also in his "Essential Figures." In the latter, the monumental biomorphic presence hovering at the center of these compositions is, in fact, a geometric abstraction of the canted head, twisted torso, and limply bent knees of Christ hanging on the cross. Like the suite of etchings that distill each facet of 'The Tesseract' into graphic form, Ziegler seeks to build wholeness out of eclecticism and cross-pollination.

Of all his mythic inspirations, Ziegler points to one theme that has recurred across millennia at moments of radical societal upheaval: expulsion. The expulsion from Eden, for example, was a story of enmity and toil entering the world, between humans and the rest of creation, and among humans themselves. Little wonder that this iconography should be so prevalent in Ziegler's work, with the existential questions AI and machine learning have introduced today around the future of human labor and the climate. Yet, when the garden gates closed on Adam and Eve, humanity faced both the stinging loss of eternal belonging as well as the promise of transformation. In ancient texts like the Bible, the solitary space of the desert was also a vital site for spiritual renewal. In Masaccio's mural program (whose scene of Adam and Eve's banishment Ziegler quotes repeatedly), a fresco showing humanity's fall from grace had a critical place within the larger pictorial arc—as a visual prologue to the story of redemption that followed.

On the other side of expulsion, in short, lies transformation. We see these divine contradictions throughout 'The Tesseract', like the many flaming figures, some of whom the fires consume, while others they transform. Some figures are so enveloped by shape and pattern that it's as if Ziegler painted them from the inside out, their skin a membrane so vibrant that we seem to be seeing matter in the process of transfiguration. Like Robert Ryman's white paintings, Ziegler's monochromes are no less metaphysical. What represented the dead-end of painting for Ryman was also a kind of emptying of itself that made possible the medium's transcendence. At a time when image-making itself is facing radical digital disruption, Ziegler's works ask what we carry with us into the breach. What room is left for the subjective self in the age of AI? What—out of the stories civilizations have long told in their efforts to make sense of exponential change—can we hold as distinctly human under this new conceptual regime of the machine?

In the end, Ziegler refrains from overt ethical judgment or prediction, but he acknowledges that the transformation that lies on the other side of this modern-day expulsion myth will not arrive without turmoil. In one painting, a single face (whose likeness recalls Ziegler himself) stares out at the viewer against a golden background, with hair tousled like a crown of thorns. It recalls the devotional type known as the "Man of Sorrows," where Christ, both dead and alive, wears a crown of thorns and displays the wounds of his crucifixion. In other paintings, we see Ziegler in the thick of the pictorial melee, at his easel or seated in contemplation. If 'The Tesseract' is prophetic, it is so in asserting that art and artists must help us through these growing pains toward a new world order to come.

— Jeffrey Richmond-Moll, Ph.D., The George Putnam Curator of American Art, Peabody Essex Museum