

heinz mack

b. 1931, Lollar, Germany

lives and works between Mönchengladbach, Germany and Ibiza, Spain

Throughout his career, Heinz Mack (Lollar, Germany, 1931) has continuously carved a pioneering artistic production marked by investigations on light, temporality and movement, which have taken the form of major installations, as well as sculptures, paintings and works on paper. Mack began his career in the 1950s, famously founding the Group ZERO (1957–1966) alongside Otto Piene in 1957, later also joining forces with Gunther Uecker in 1961, with the aim of creating a space devoid of pre-existing structures for new possibilities and beginnings to emerge. Mack was also in close contact with artist Yves Klein, with whom he developed a great friendship and collaborated on numerous occasions, and who introduced him to Jean Tinguely, discovering a universe of experimentations that informed his own search for aesthetic purity, striving for an essential, unmediated work. Mack notably wrote,

'The goal is to achieve pure, grand, objective clarity, free of romantic, arbitrarily individual expression. In my work I explore and strive for structural phenomena, whose strict logic I interrupt or expand by means of aleatoric interventions, that is, chance events.'

Heinz Mack's oeuvre is characterized by disruptive engagements with light, and ways in which it affects and is affected by movement, space, and color. With this idea forming the core of his practice, the artist has rigorously and shrewdly developed a multi-faceted body of work that has recurrently opened new horizons for the realm of art.

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selected solo exhibitions

- The light in Me, Osthaus Museum, Hagen, Germany, (2023)
- Vibration of Light, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, Venice, Italy (2022)
- Paragold, Nara Roesler, São Paulo, Brazil (2021)
- Taten Des Lichts: Mack & Goethe, Goethe-Museum, Düsseldorf, Germany (2018)
- Heinz Mack From Time to Time. Painting and Sculpture, 1994–2016, Palais Schönborn Batthyány, Vienna, Austria (2016)

- Mack Just Light and Color, Sakip Sabanci Museum, Istanbul, Turkey (2016)
- Heinz Mack The light of my colors, Museum Ulm, Ulm, Germany (2015)
- The Sky Over Nine Columns, Venice Biennale, Italy (2014)
- Mack The Language of My Hand, Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, Germany (2011)
- Heinz Mack Licht der ZERO-Zeit, Ludwig Museum im Deutschherrenhaus, Koblenz, Germany (2009)
- 1950-2006, Pergamon Museum, Berlin, Germany (2006)

selected group exhibitions

- Parallel Inventions: Julio Le Parc, Heinz Mack, Nara Roesler, New York, USA (2023)
- The Sky as Studio Yves Klein and his contemporaries, Pompidou Metz, Metz, France (2021)
- Visual Play, Wilhelm Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen, Germany (2018)
- New Beginnings: Between Gesture and Geometry, George Economou Collection, Athens, Greece (2016)
- Facing the Future. Art in Europe, 1945–68, Palais des Beaux Arts, Brussels, Belgium (2016)
- ZERO: Let Us Explore the Stars, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands (2015)
- ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s-60s, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA (2015)
- The Sky over Nine Columns, 14th Venice Architecture Biennale, Italy (2014)
- 35th Venice Biennale, Italy (1970)
- Documenta II (1959) and Documenta III (1966), Kassel, Germany

selected collections

- Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, USA
- Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, France
- Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington DC, USA
- Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA
- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, USA
- Tate, London, UK
- Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, USA
- Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, USA

5 works on paper and early paintings

6 sculptures

37 land art

44 paintings & collages



A world without art would be Like a sky in the night Without the light of the stars. They appear like meteors Ideas fully unexpected—Only a few people see them.

Paintings and sculptures are
Planets of the sun and make you forget
The black depths of the night
From which they arise.

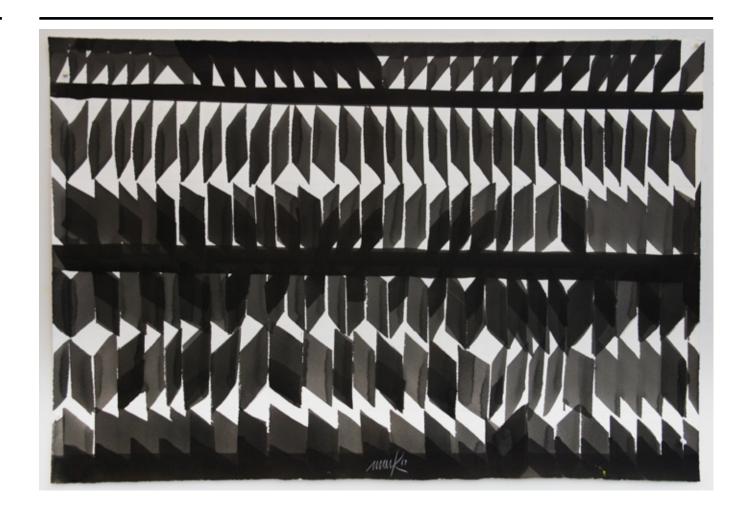
A world without art would be
A gray world between day
And night, in which time stands
Still, in an empty room,
Without shadow, but also without light.

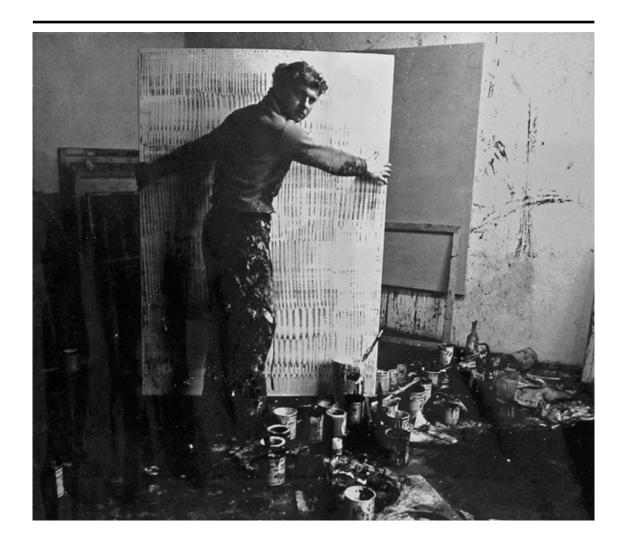
Art expresses
That a gray world would be
Unbearable.

-Heinz Mack

works on paper and early paintings

Heinz Mack's works on paper have been an essential part of his artistic output since early on in his career, continuously contributing to the artist's relentless work with light and movement, with capturing and calibrating the vibration of light. Following an initial production of figurative works, produced as an art academy and philosophy student, the medium became a channel for Mack to redefine, or reconceive, his work amidst what he has often described as a moment of crisis and self-doubt. In the artist's own words, 'A drawing is a kind of intimate and calm dialogue between the soul and the critical intellect, seismographically recorded by the hand,' and thus, he engaged in a process of liberation through drawing.

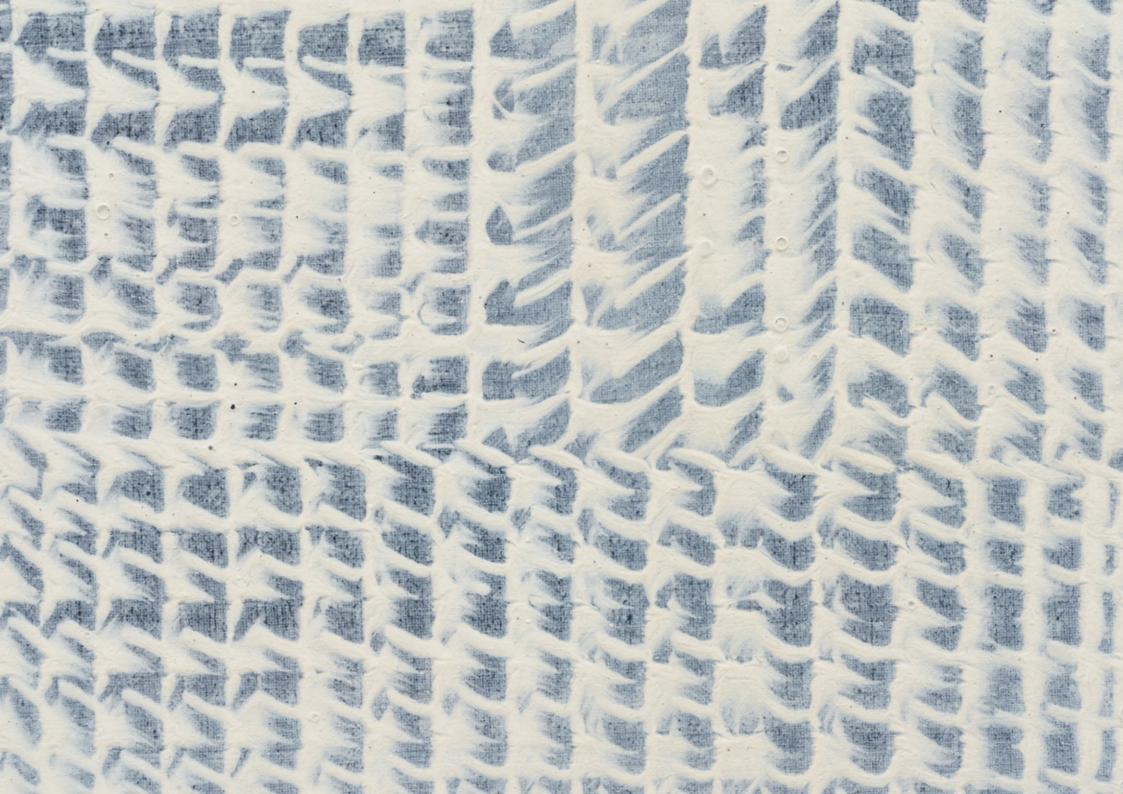


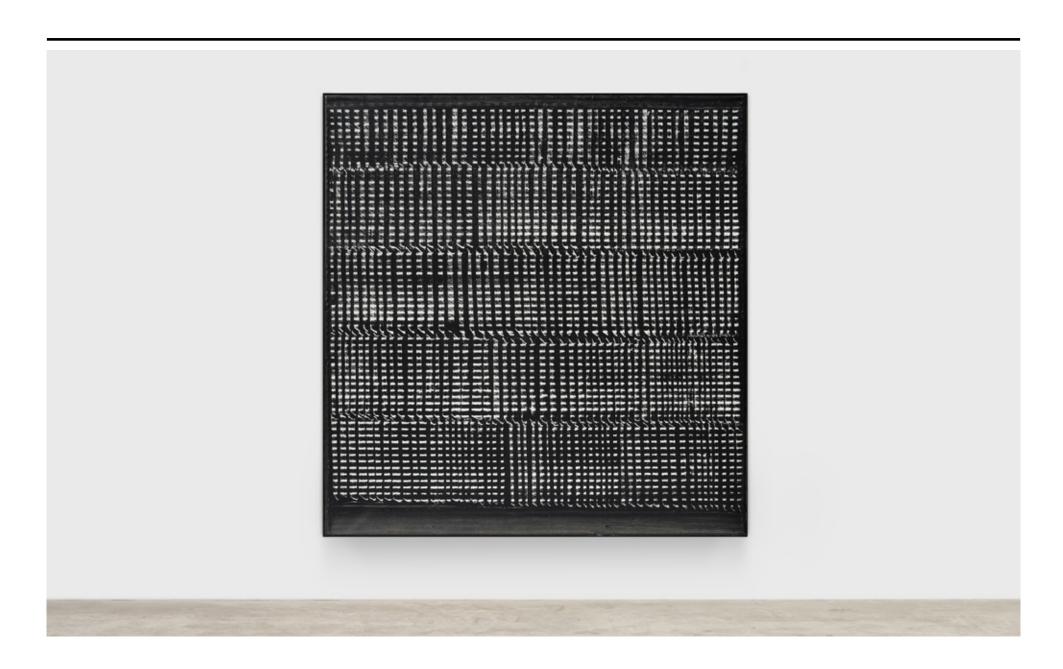


Heinz Mack in his studio Gladbacher Straße, Düsseldorf, ca. 1958 courtesy of Holdings Heinz Mack photo: Charles Wilp Between 1956 and 1957, while still a member of the Gruppe 53, the artist produced a series of drawings described by curator Beat Wismer as the result of gentle, perhaps intentionless movements of the hand that draw the pen across the paper leaving behind black traces. The works emerge as a form of radical, meditative exercises that sought a reduction to a square one, a place of silence, a zero, in order to achieve the elemental.

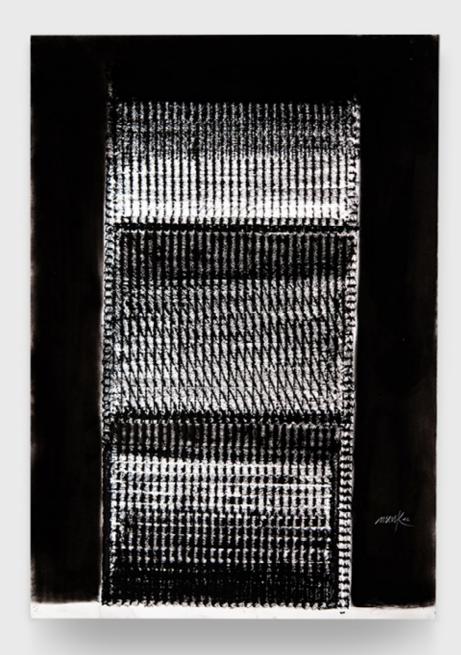
Following this period, and having by then co-founded Group ZERO with Otto Piene, he continued producing drawings that captured a growing assertiveness, with increasingly dense strokes of graphite and charcoal pencil. It has notably been argued that the works on paper reveal an engagement with the idea of a technical existence, coined by philosopher Max Bense who called for contemporary art to 'match the structures and textures of our spirit', that is a spirit shaped by technology. In addition, in the following decades, Mack developed a technique of frottage which consisted of transferring the texture of a relief surface made with aluminum or other materials, onto paper or canvas.







He produced metal or wooden structures, which he placed under the paper, rubbing for the underlying formations to imprint onto the surface, becoming part of the process and of the final work. With this, the artist translated the light and shadows from a dimensional surface into flat plays with black and white rhythms, or what he describes as 'energy fields'.



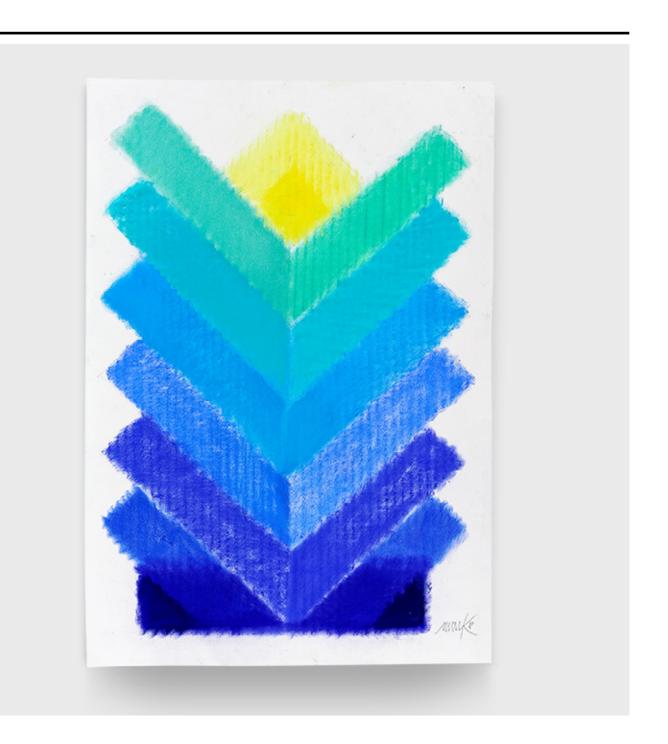


Mack also produced a series of works coined *Color Chromaticisms*, whereby he experimented with color pastels and wax crayons, in an endeavor to 'delineate the purity of the primary colors and their nuanced changeovers as expressively as possible, making the light visible in favor of the colors' great intensity and their function.'

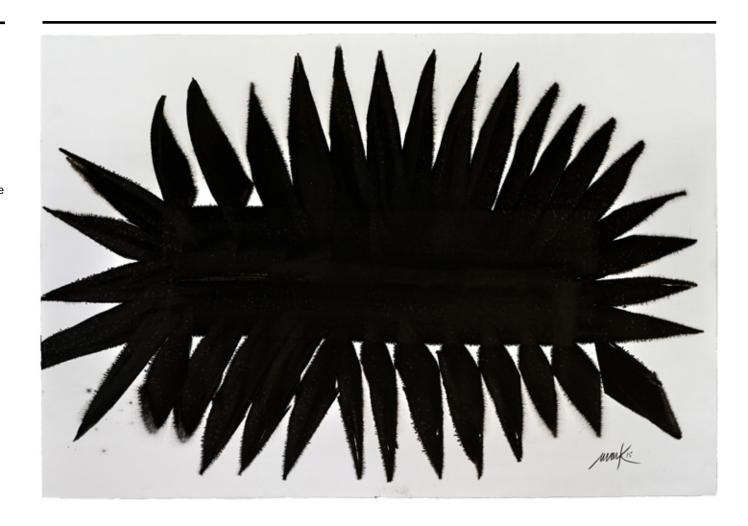


← Heinz Mack, Günther Uecker and Otto Piene courtesy of Holdings Heinz Mack

Untitled (Chromatic Constellation), 2010 acrylic paint on canvas 30.7 x 26 in 78 x 66 cm



Over the past years, mostly beginning in 2010s, Mack created an important body of work made with brushed India ink on paper, notably finding inspiration in the abstract qualities of oriental and Islamic art. Unlike his earlier pieces, these brush drawings did not use an underlying structure, but rather were the result of the artist's free hand. The works embody the artist's play with the pulse of light through a more intuitive process as he engaged with the serendipity inherent to the human stroke despite a seemingly structured process and intention. Once applied the ink allows for no corrections, and thus captures every movement in all of its uniqueness, making the works the result of an encounter between the stubborn, untameable medium and the artist's profound concentration in an attempt to master it.



Untitled, 2015 Indian ink on handmade paper 76 x 112 cm 30 x 44 in





sculptures

Beginning in 1958, Mack began producing his Light reliefs—a series of sculptures consisting of metal surfaces, which the artist sculpted either manually or mechanically, into grid-like structures of reliefs carved at different angles. With both raised and depressed volumes, of different depths and heights, as the light hits the surface it reflects it at varying intensities, with brightness and shadows changing depending on the location, angular positioning, or time of day. The metal panels thus reflect light at different rhythms, creating a form of kinetic art that combines light and movement through the motor-less manipulation of light. The natural variation in the medium generates a perception of dynamism producing movement without physical interjection, or induced motion, but rather by using the very fundamental element of optical phenomena, that is light, in its pure form.

Heinz Mack in front of his work Kleiner Urwald at Galeria Hans Mayer, 1964 courtesy of Holdings Heinz Mack







Lightgrid-relief, 1984 varnished steel, brass and wood 100 x 91,5 x 41,5 cm 39.4 x 36 x 16.3 in



Sand-relief, 1966 sand, wood and acrylic 68 x 91 x 3 cm 26.8 x 35.8 x 1.2 in

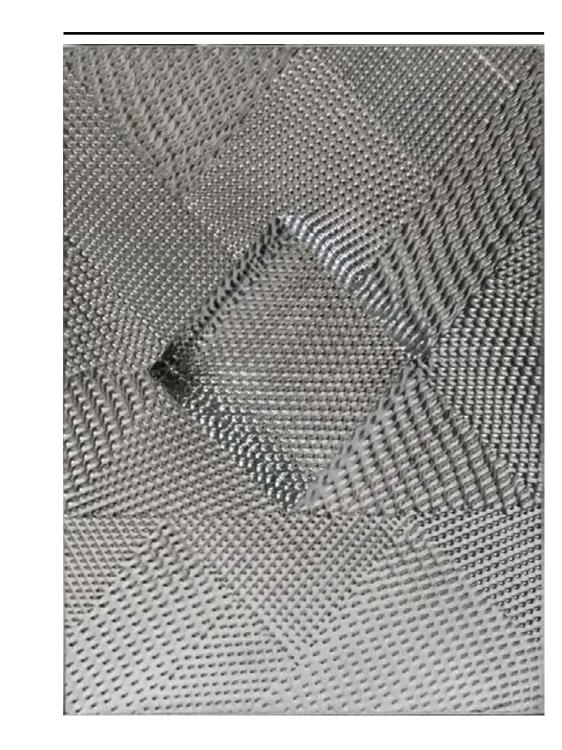








Licht-Relief, 1958 Aluminum on wood 55 x 60 x 8 cm 21.7 x 23.6 x 3.1 in



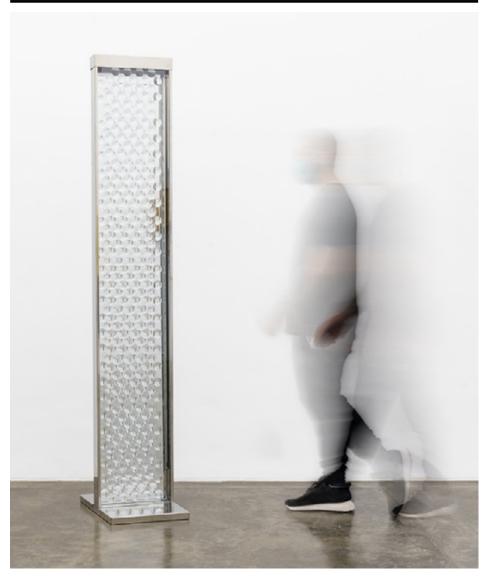


Open Bronze Cube, 2001 patinated and polished bronze 71 x 71 x 70 cm 28 x 28 x 27.6 in

Having produced this body of work, Mack also became interested in playing with his manipulations of light in relation to space, and outdoor space. With this emerged a body of larger-scale works often characterized by the use of light as a means of mirroring and integrating its surroundings and viewers into its surfaces. Mack notably built installations using broken strips of mirrors, which distort the environment and thus trigger an intellectual engagement from the audience as it attempts to understand how the reflections and modulations are created. Mack also created columnar structures covered with fractured mirrors or circular, concave mirrors that reflect its surroundings as individual miniature forms that together form a puzzlelike and recomposed reflection of reality. These pillars ranged from smaller scales, all the way to 200-meter high installations, as he envisioned for the city of Duisburg.



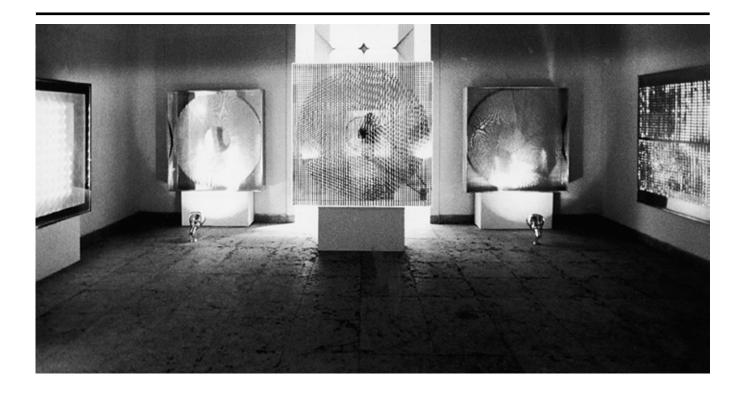




Kleiner Lichtwald, 1959/60 aluminum, plexi glass, electricity 141 x 39 x 39 cm 55.5 x 15.4 x 15.4 in

Light-Rain, 2002 stainless steel and acrylic 205 x 35 x 9 cm | 80.7 x 13.8 x 3.5 in Plinth: 3 x 36 x 52 cm | 1.2 x 14.2 x 20.5 in





In 1959, Mack produced his first kinetic works to make use of motorized movement, which he often described as Light Dynamos, Emanations of Light, or Rotors. The works are made using textured plates that are attached to a back wall and placed on the inside of a box, and which can be made to rotate with a small motor. The box is closed on its front side with corrugated glass, and thus, once set in motion, the rotating disks create light refractions that shimmer and transform through almost imperceptible movement, occasionally amplified by built-in artificial light. After 1960, Mack began to use new materials such as aluminum, optical lenses, stainless steel, anodized aluminum, reflective glass and Fresnel lenses, employed as a means of creating different abstract optical and color effects that may scatter, reflect, refract, focus or diversify light.1

 \leftarrow

Veil of Light, 1964 aluminum, acrylic and stainless steel $172 \times 132 \times 62$ cm | $67.7 \times 52 \times 24.4$ in plinth: $2.5 \times 120 \times 50.5$ cm | $1 \times 47.2 \times 19.9$ in

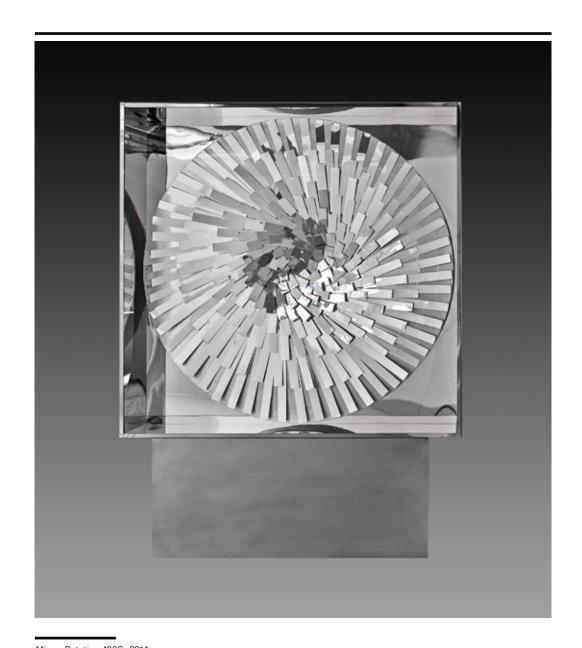
exhibition view German Pavilion, 1970 35th Venice Biennale courtesy of Holdings Heinz Mack



Untitled, 1970 aluminum, wave glass, stainless steel and motor 38 x 38 x 14 cm 15 x 15 x 5.5 in

→
Heinz Mack with a group
of wooden sculptures, 2020
courtesy of Holdings Heinz Mack







Mirror-Rotation, 1960–2014 stainless steel, acrylic, wood and motor $150 \times 150 \times 25 \text{ cm} \mid 59.1 \times 59.1 \times 9.8 \text{ in}$ reverse driver: 20 cm | 7.9 in pedestal: $60 \times 125 \times 35,5 \text{ cm} \mid 23.6 \times 49.2 \times 14 \text{ in}$

Rotor for Light and Shadow, 1966–2010 wood, acrylic, cardboard and motor $102 \times 102 \times 20$ cm | $40.2 \times 40.2 \times 7.9$ in reverse driver: 14 cm | 5.5 in pedestal: $60 \times 70 \times 36$ cm | $23.6 \times 27.6 \times 14.2$ in

From this experimental core, emerged an immense variety of objects that engaged with light, movement, and color, in different ways and with different purposes. Mack notably produced monumental installations made of mirror parts placed in labyrinth-like patterns on the floor—in 1970, he placed over 500 mirrors on the German Pavilion of the Osaka World Fair, accompanied by two interlocking stainless steel spheres, motorized to rotate on their axis. Alternatively, in 1971, he created a curtain of mirror spirals hung from above, which he came to install in Warsaw as an allusion to the Iron Curtain. According to Mack, the work was thus transformed from a symbol of impenetrable division into a moving object, with gusts of wind breaking through it, and the reflected light giving it a sense of immateriality.









In 1979, Mack also employed laser technology, with which he created a Light Festival on the occasion of the jubilee celebration of the Association of German Artists, marking a new form of light use, devoid of structural, or sculptural encasements. Eventually, Mack also came to include water in his installations, using strong jets of water, sphere shaped fountains, and fans, in order to orchestrate geometric and sculptural water forms.

As a means of capturing the extent of the variety of the artist's experimentations, it is notably important to highlight the work titled, *Do you see the wind? Greetings to Jean Tinguely* (1962), whereby Mack hung reflective strips of aluminum onto a standard ventilator. When switched on, the wind from the ventilator sets the strips in motion creating everchanging reflections of light through the movement of the aluminum in the air.

Throughout his sculptural practice,
Mack also frequently included the creation
and manipulation of color through his
construction of prism-like objects, columns
and spheres, whose specially laminated
glass change colors depending on its
exposure to light and on the angle of vision.



Four illuminated stones, 2004 4 alabaster stones and electrical accessories $76 \times 50 \times 27$ cm | $29.9 \times 19.7 \times 10.6$ in steel pedestal $52 \times 220 \times 60$ cm | $20.5 \times 86.6 \times 23.6$ in

land art

sahara

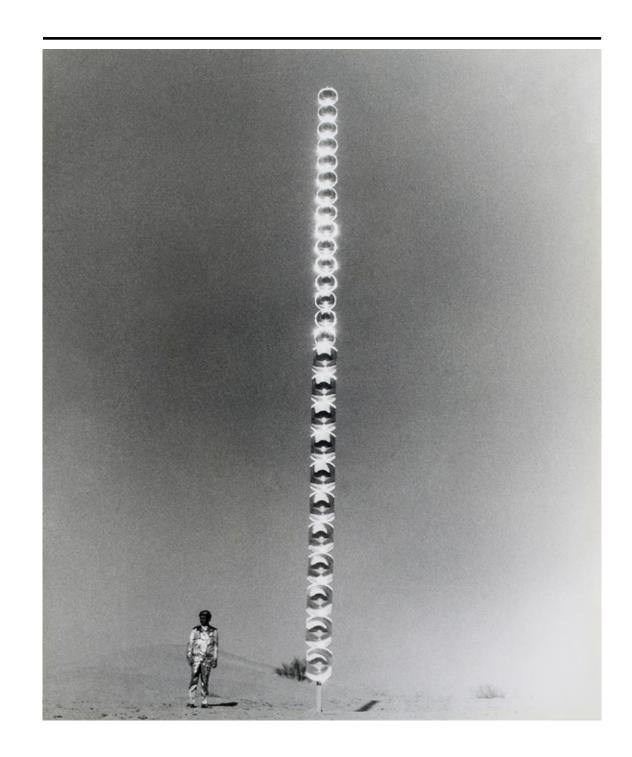
As early as 1959, Heinz Mack began to conceive and map out a project, which he named the Sahara-Projekt. The idea emerged out of the artist's necessity to break free from what he described as an overcrowded environment—full of manmade structures, furniture, buildings, people—preventing his works from having independence and freedom. In the Sahara, the artist found a vast land undomesticated by civilization. With this in mind, Mack mapped out a series of stations, where he would set up objects or experiences in the context of the desert, creating a body of work that was art historically ahead of what would later be understood as Earth Art or Land Art.





Mack's first expedition to the Sahara took place in 1968, and was documented in a film titled *Tele-Mack*, which notably accompanies the erection of the artist's light steles. The monumental sculptures are built as vertical columns, covered with mirrors, Fresnel lenses and prisms, that work to engage with the intense natural light of the desert—further intensifying it, triggering vibrations and capturing, or rather materializing light in space. It is important to note that the project has been traced back to Constantin Brancusi's influence on Mack, in his strive to achieve the transcendence of the art object through its dematerialization, its dissolution in rhythmic movement, and a potential expansion and endlessness of form.²

² *Mack Kinetik*. (Stadtisches Museum: Dusseldorf, 2011). pp.97.





In 1968, the artist also carried out ephemeral actions in the desert. For example, Der Kunstler und seine Fahne, which translates to the artist and his flag, whereby Mack held an 8 meter-long banner made of reflective foil from the top of a sand dune, capturing and potentizing the desert's piercing light.

In 1976, Mack returned with both transitory actions and stations, notably installing the work *Fire in the Desert*, where he set up a rotating mirror disk that created the illusion of a mirage. He also built his *Desert Ship*, a wooden framework carrying fireworks, which lit up into precise choreographies in space, creating a stage for the phenomenon of light to unravel in one of its most intense forms. His ephemeral actions notably included, *The Geometer's Dream*, whereby Mack extended a long reflective foil down the hill of a sand dune.

Heinz Mack at the Grand Erg Oriental, 1976





arctic

Heinz Mack's works in the Arctic were first conceived in 1966, but only executed in 1976. The project was also idealized with the purpose of creating a space devoid of human contamination, where his works could exist freely. The Arctic offered unique and extreme light conditions, entwined with ice and water that reflected and amplified its effects. In the Arctic, Mack notably constructed a 100 meter-long silver arc, which captured and reflected the beaming light, establishing a framing line that formally complemented the surrounding snow hills. The artist also built a water sculpture, made with wooden poles arranged in a radial configuration, which moved along with the ebbs of the water and the push of the wind, titled Water Lily. The work remained in the Arctic where it was progressively relinquished by nature. This was also the site of another iteration of Mack's fireworks projects, titled Fire Float.

Licht-Architecture (Model for a swimming research station in the arctic), 1976





paintings & collages

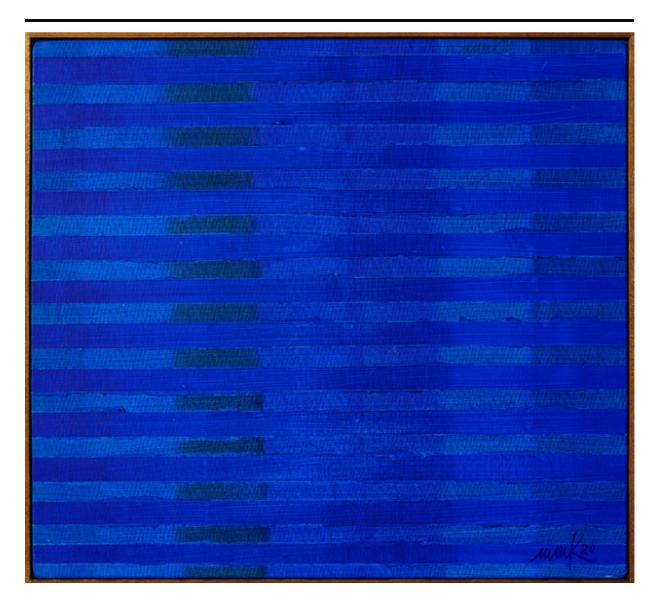
Following Heinz Mack's experimentations with painting as a member of Group ZERO, the artist abandoned the medium in 1963, for over two decades. In 1990, he found a new source of inspiration upon his travel to the island of Ibiza, which he describes as an 'island of light, everything is shrouded in light, touched, caressed and ultimately dominated by light.' The paintings explore the recurrent themes that Mack has meticulously and relentlessly engaged with in his other bodies of work—namely light, color and rhythm—which he intertwines in a process of making that combines intuitive gesture and meditative repose.

Heinz Mack in his studio Mönchengladbach, Germany, 2013

→ Untitled, 2018 acrylic on paper 76,5 x 110 cm 30 x 43 in







Untitled, 2018 acrylic paint on hand-made paper 76,5 x 110 cm 30.1 x 43.3 in Untitled (Chromatic Constellation), 2020 acrylic paint on canvas 50,5 x 55 x 3 cm 19.9 x 21.7 x 1.2 in

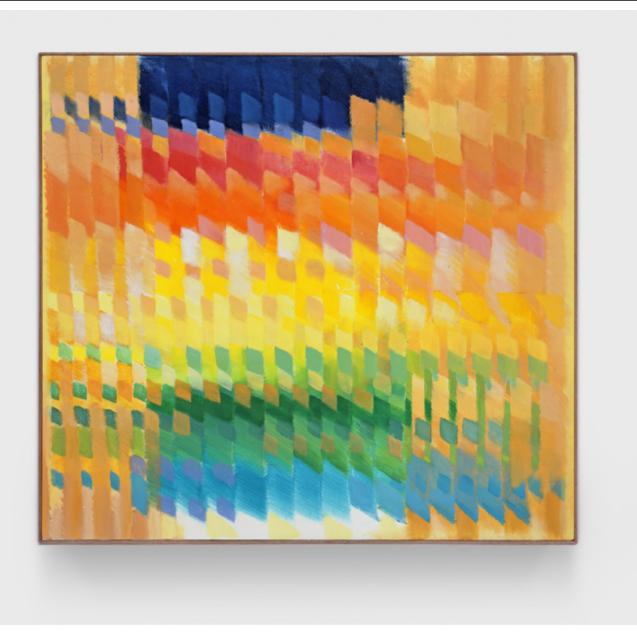


In the artist's words, 'I have always been fascinated by painting when it is filled with light. But, for me, painting is also much more than this: it is the foreground of the infinitely deep and black space, in which light and color have been inseparable from each other. The identity of light and color, which becomes visible in the spectrum, is the subject of my painting—it is the only subject.' Through his painting, the artist engages with light, color and movement, intricately interweaving them, so that one exists and is enhanced because of the qualities of the others. Mack's paintings are characterized by a highly consistent pictorial use of color, anchored in the alternation of chromatic modulations, which the artist executes as a means of achieving what he defines as color vibration.

← Untitled (Chromatic Constellation), 2019 acrylic paint on canvas 62.2 x 94.5 x 1.2 in 158 x 240 x 3 cm

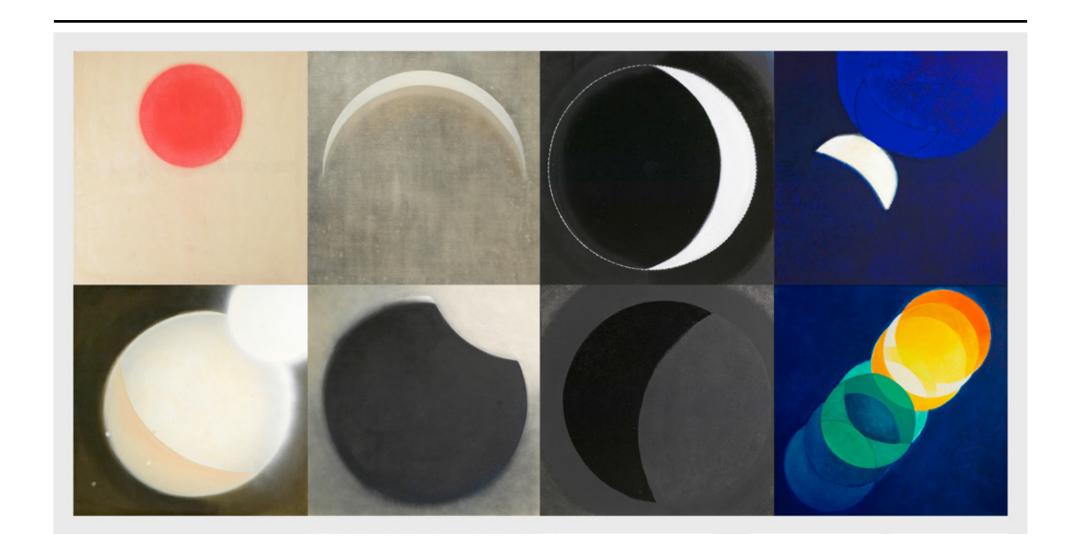
Untitled, 2019 pastel 107 x 78 cm 42 x 31 in





The succession from one color to the next, and their varying light intensities create an illusion of movement leading the eye through the composition at different speeds and allowing for processes of division and binding to emerge depending on the colors' shading, brightness or darkness. Luminosity is further enhanced by allowing glimpses of a white canvas or of underlying layers of white to shimmer through and imbue the applied colors with light.3 As described by critic Eva Muller-Remmert, 'Mack's colors thus reveal themselves to be properties of light that break down into its spectrum. His application of paint is open, transparent and full of motion; the density of the pigments vary and vibrate, so that it almost appears as though the air in front of the canvas was flickering.'

³ Tolnay, Alexander, *MACK Malerei / Painting 1991–2011*. (Kuehlen Verlag: 2011)

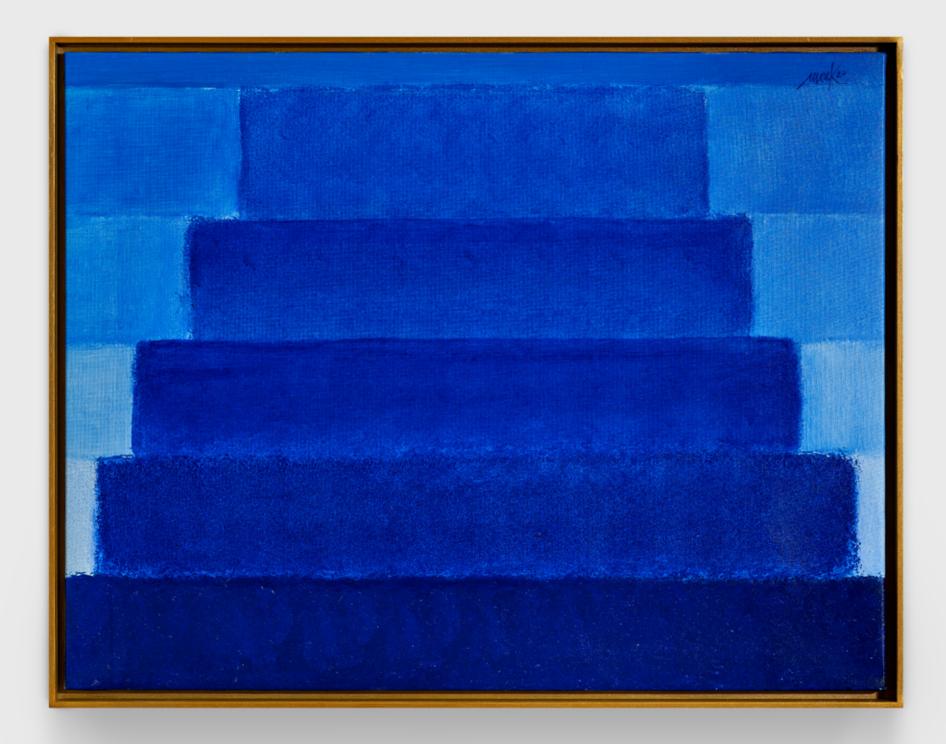




Most recently, Mack has continued exploring the phenomena of these three elements, as well as his long-standing interest in oriental motifs, through a newfound use of collages. On one hand, the artist has created a body of work that, unlike his paintings' seamless amalgamation of color, makes use of scissors to separate and modularly reconstruct painted paper, embracing sharp edges perhaps as a means of enhancing the contrast between light and dark fields. On the other hand, Mack has also produced a series of collages cut with pinking shears that create a shimmering effect between the sheets. As curator Stephan Geiger suggested, collages have offered a new channel for Mack to explore his artistic range, transposing the colors of his canvases—with new textures, edges and dimensionality—and thus, representing a painterly expansion for the artist.

Untitled, 2018 acrylic on hand-made paper 111.5 x 76 cm 44 x 30 in

→ Untitled (Chromatic Constellation), 2020 acrylic paint on canvas 32.3 x 40.9 x 1.6 in 82 x 104 x 4 cm





Untitled (Chromatic Constellation), 2014 acrylic paint on canvas 59.4 x 52.4 x 3 in 151 x 133 x 7,5 cm



Untitled (Chromatic Constellation), 2019 acrylic paint on canvas 27.2 x 31.9 x 1.2 in 69 x 81 x 3 cm

→
Heinz Mack with his work
Untitled, 2014



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