

SONNENÜBERFLUTUNG (TRANSGRESSION) 1963

GÜNTHER UECKER

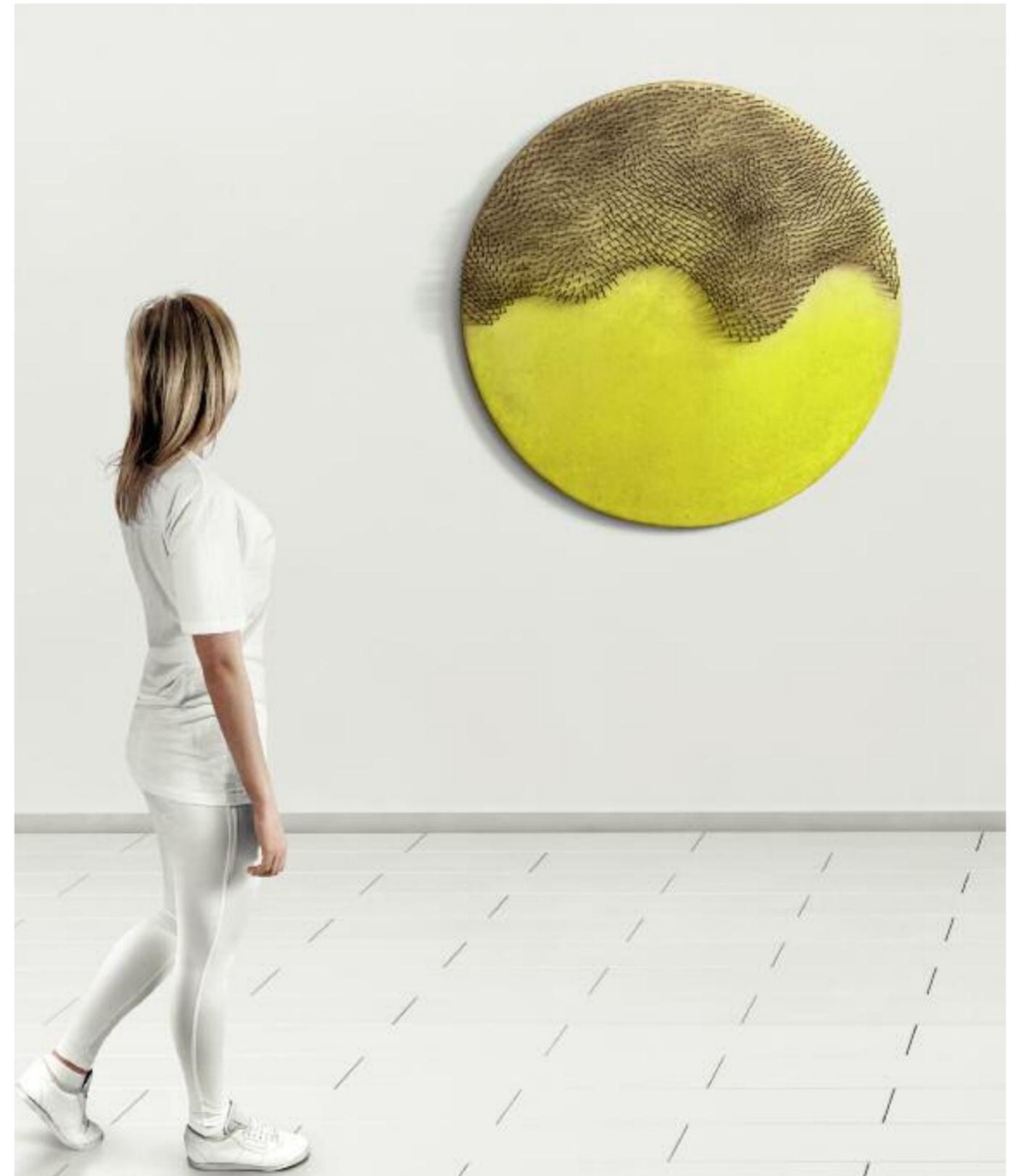
nails and acrylic
on canvas on wood
1963
diameter 100 cm
diameter 39 3/8 in.
verso signed, dated,
titled and inscribed

Provenance
Studio of the artist
Private collection
Private collection, Germany

Exhibited
4. Biennale Internazionale d'Arte, San Marino 1963. Cat. p. 159, ill.

Honisch 247

Literature
Helms, Dietrich. Günther Uecker. Berlin 1970. p. 44, ill.
Honisch, Dieter. Uecker. Stuttgart 1983. p. 186, no. 247, ill.
(titled 'Transgression', illustrated falsely).



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Günther Uecker, born in Mecklenburg in 1930, initially studied in Wismar and Berlin and, finally, after fleeing to the West, at the Kunstakademie (Arts Academy) in Düsseldorf. During his time as a student, he had already come into close contact with the German and French Avant-garde and the artists of what would later be the ZERO movement. In 1957 he met Yves Klein in Düsseldorf; Klein later became Uecker's brother-in-law when he married the latter's sister Rotraut in 1962.

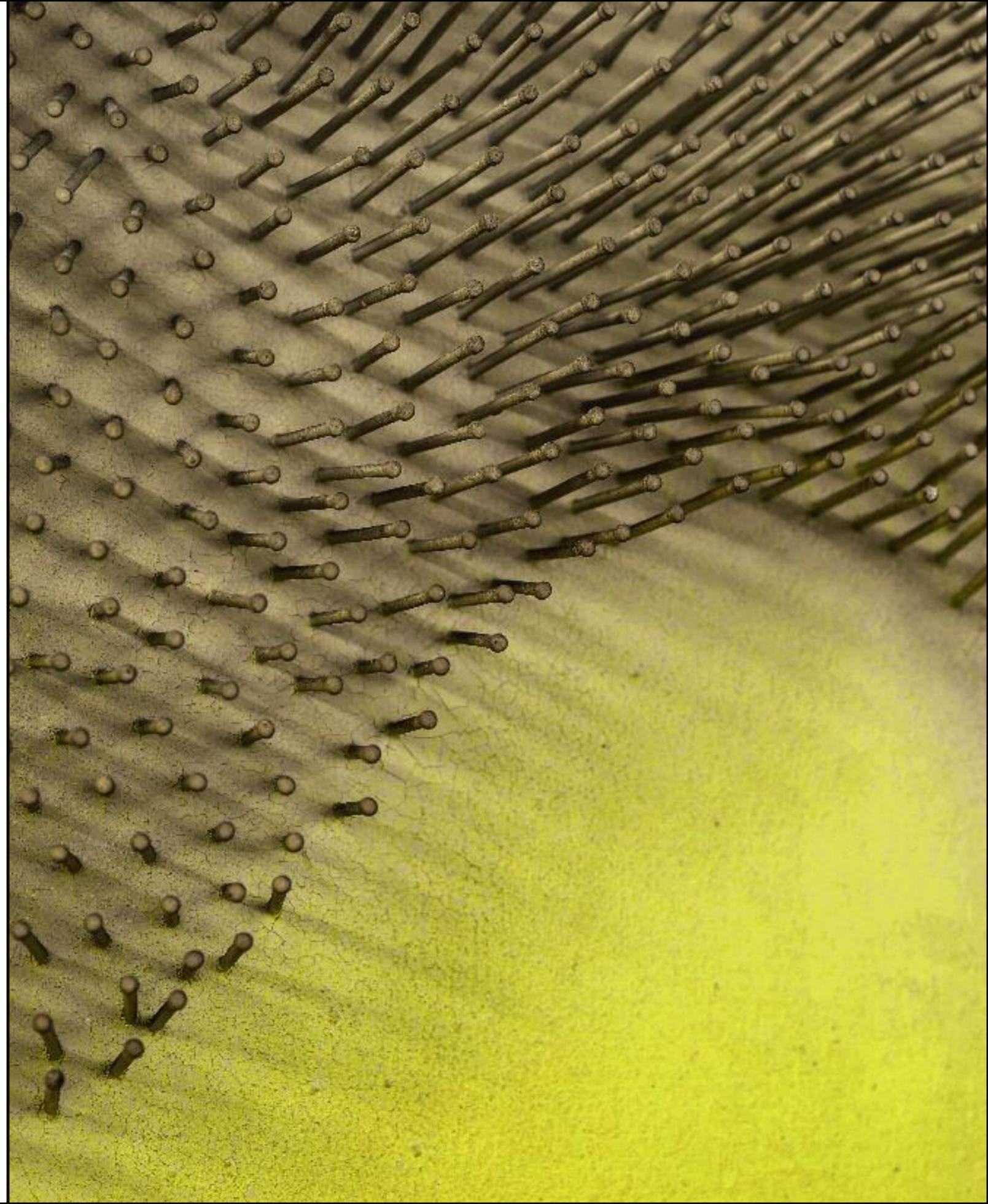
With Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, Uecker was a member of the ZERO group, which had been founded in 1958, from 1961 to 1965. The zenith of this European art movement was the major exhibition dedicated to it at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in 1962, at which Uecker's work was also prominently represented.

At this time, Uecker had already developed his nail pictures and nailed objects, for which he became famous, from the source in his earlier structured pictures. The possibility this offered for creating a three-dimensional material image that is capable of capturing movement and light even in a panel picture, was especially important to him.

Uecker continued the development of the nail pictures through spirals and organic forms to the 'nailing over' of other objects. Uecker thereby attained an extremely independent transformation of his structured pictures, which were still closely based on the Concrete art of the 1950s, into a unique pictorial language with a strong sensuous element.

The light and the constant changing of the work through the effect of light and the angle of observation are particularly important – in this way Uecker succeeded in integrating into his work movement and time sequence, that is, the kinetic effects that were of such significance to the artists of the ZERO group. Günther Uecker did not restrict himself to a simply purist aesthetic but went beyond that to incorporate a transcendent spiritual level. In a text written in 1961, Uecker formulated it as follows: "I am thinking of a reality that is presently unfolding and that preserves its eternal value in its dynamics. ... The light will make us fly, and we will see the sky from above. Everything will permeate us, will pass through us just as it passes through Something and Nothing. ... The beauty of light will take on every form we desire and dream of."¹

¹ Quoted from Wieland Schmied. Günther Uecker. Exhib. Cat., Kestner-Gesellschaft Hannover 1972, p. 39.





Günther Uecker with
Das gelbe Bild
of 1957/58,
Düsseldorf 2005

All these elements and ideas are perfectly expressed in the picture *Sonnenüberflutung* from 1963. The structure of the nails, which at first glance appears organic and seems to sweep over the surface of the picture like a breath of wind, opens our view to a higher order that is not actually discernible with the normal senses. The contrast Uecker typically makes between design that requires 'brute force' – the visible disclosure of 'how the picture is made' and the light, poetic, even ephemeral effect is especially vivid in this nail picture. Uecker's ability to transform metal and strength into light and air is evident in this work to a particularly strong degree.

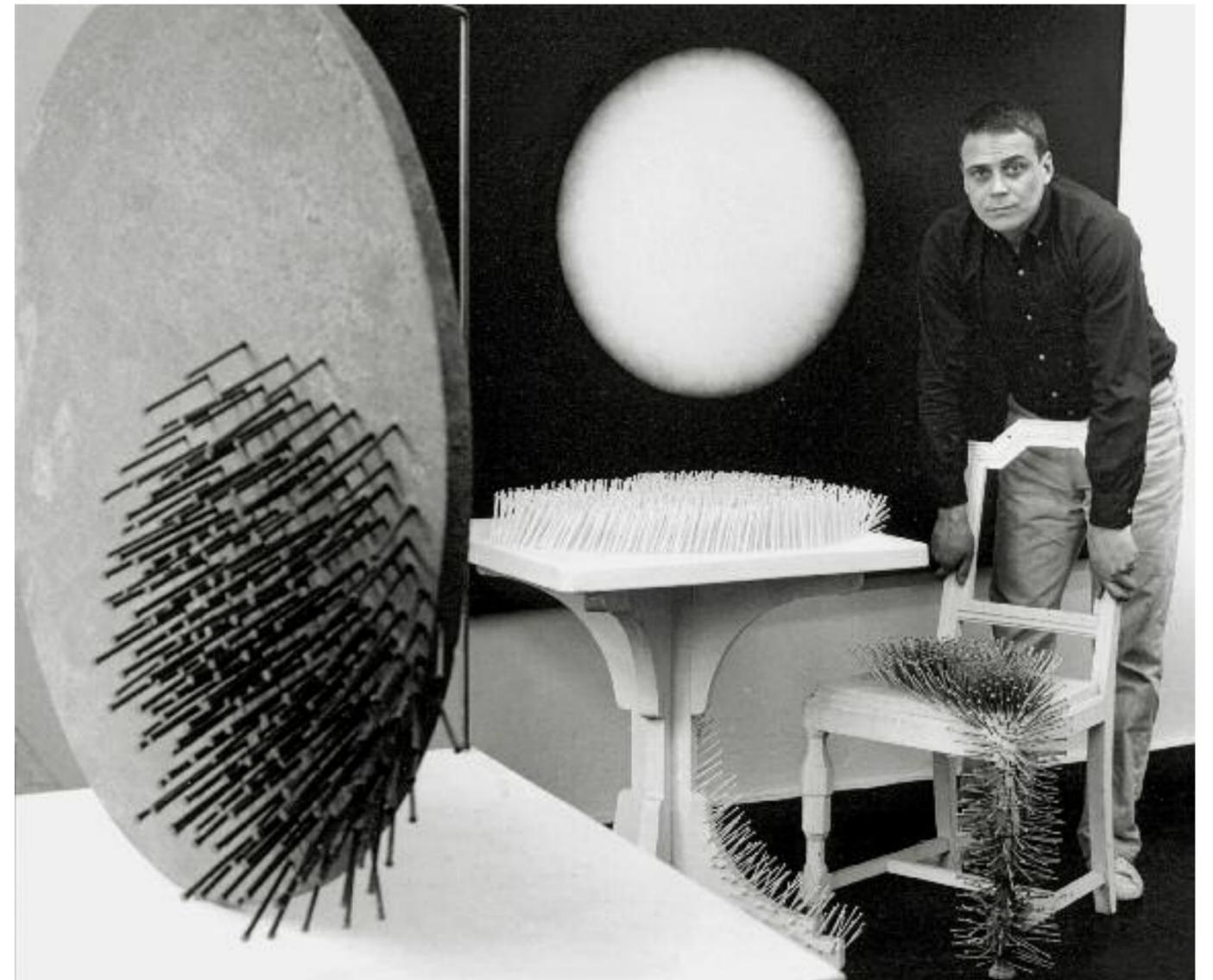
The encroachment of the picture's surface into the room and the perforation of the surface of the picture by the nails for the same purpose are a direct reaction to the work of Lucio Fontana, who is referenced by Uecker in several instances. This act of 'trespass' is addressed by the subtitle of the work – Transgression – and uses this technical term to describe the flooding, in this case by the sun. The theme of flooding is very apparent in Uecker's work in this period: he makes it a central theme in a

performance for a lecture by Bazon Brock at the Galerie d in Frankfurt in September 1963 and in his *Flood Manifesto*.² Subsequently, Uecker's waves of nails conquer not only the image fields and the circle of the sun in this work, but also three-dimensional objects, such as furniture and pianos. Uecker himself described his approach in a radio interview with Deutschlandfunk on March 11, 2005:

"I had these elaborated pictorial structural fields, which were something like meditative fields of observation, for myself as autotherapy in order to find composure; the thought that these elaborated structures should now suddenly cover furniture and the banal, secularized area of work and life of the population, was at that time an idea, a manifesto of transgression: to flood the world with art, and so I thought: no pictures on the wall, but up on the furniture, on this undying foreman, this atavism of a cultic deed – you don't know what you're doing, yet you still polish the furniture every day – here a nail must be hammered in to create resistance in order to clarify the contemplation of my work – that art can penetrate right into this banality of life."

² 'Sinnflutmanifest – Überflutung der Welt', 1963, cf. Dorothea and Martin van der Koelen (Eds.), Günther Uecker, *Opus Liber, Verzeichnis der bibliophilen Bücher und Werke, 1960-2005*. Mainz 2007, No. L 6303, pp. 30-31.

³ 'Zero – Der neue Idealismus' was a flyer that Uecker, Mack und Piene had printed for the opening of their exhibition in the Galerie Diogenes in Berlin in 1963. Quoted from: Heiner Stachelhaus. *ZERO*, Mack, Piene, Uecker. Düsseldorf 1993, p. 49.



Günther Uecker
in Hanover 1965

As metaphors for the sun, both tondi and the colour yellow crop up regularly in Uecker's work from the late 1950s onwards, but apart from *Sonnenüberflutung*, there is only one other round nail picture that also uses the colour yellow. All his other tondi are either white or are in the form of light discs equipped with a kinetic mechanism and illumination. This combination is one of the most direct implementations of the maxims of the ZERO Manifesto published in 1963. There the radically concrete approach of the group is formulated as, 'ZERO is round' and, 'The sun is ZERO'.³

The hermetic content of the ZERO Manifesto and the demand for the 'Flood of Nails' in Ueckers *Flood Manifesto* find their counterpart in the cosmic symbolism of *Sonnenüberflutung*, which invites the observer by means of the work of art to allow sensuous perception and free association to flow together with the goal of reaching the spiritual freedom that the ZERO artists hoped to attain.



GÜNTHER UECKER

WENDORF 1930 – LIVES IN DÜSSELDORF

THE YEAR 1963

As early as 1961 Günther Uecker had come into fairly close contact with the artists of the ZERO group, which had been formed in 1958, and he participated in the happenings associated with their exhibition in the Galerie Schmela, where Uecker's works were subsequently also shown. Uecker was officially accepted as a member of the group in 1962, while at the same time interest in his artistic work was growing steadily, and the first German museums purchased his works for their collections.

The year 1963 was an preliminary highpoint of the ZERO movement and also of Uecker's public presence: the ZERO Manifesto was published that year, and Uecker himself propagated his manifesto of the inundation of the world by art. Uecker was awarded prizes and the chance to participate in numerous shows and he expanded his sphere of influence as far as to the USA – to New York, where he achieved major sales of his work, for example, to Rockefeller.

This intensive phase culminated in the participation of the ZERO artists at the Documenta in 1964, when they jointly designed a complete kinetic light room as a homage to Lucio Fontana.

Günther Uecker
in Düsseldorf 1971