

# DOMINIQUE LÉVY

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Media contact:  
Matthew Brown, SUTTON  
matthew@suttonpr.com

## DOMINIQUE LÉVY TO PRESENT FIRST SOLO EXHIBITION BY GÜNTHER UECKER IN LONDON IN FIFTY YEARS, FEATURING SIX NEW PAINTINGS

*Günther Uecker: Verletzte Felder (Wounded Fields)*

23 September – 29 October 2016

Dominique Lévy

22 Old Bond Street, London

Private view: 22 September 2016, 6-8pm

Reception with the artist: 5 October 2016, 6-8pm



Photo: Herbert Koller © 2016 The Artist

**London ...** Dominique Lévy is pleased to announce an upcoming exhibition of new work by German artist Günther Uecker, titled *Verletzte Felder (Wounded Fields)*, on view at the gallery's Old Bond Street location from 23 September to 29 October 2016. This will be the first solo presentation by Uecker in London in over fifty years. Spanning two floors, *Verletzte Felder (Wounded Fields)* will feature a group of new works. The gallery will publish an artist's book in conjunction with the exhibition.

The title of the exhibition is derived from a series of six large-scale paintings, presented here for the first time, which embody Uecker's highly physical approach and explore various articulations of light and shadow. On the process of creating these paintings, the artist has written:

*Canvas glued onto wood surfaces covered in thick white paint, applied by hand.*

*Emotions transform into gestures, into artistic actions—they become visible and form a field, tilled and furrowed like cropland. Nailed, planted.*

*A crevice, a gash in the painted field, struck from behind with an axe; a split in a developing structure, driven apart by nails; a battlefield.*

*The shifting daylight creates shadows in the nail fields like those on a sundial.*

*The material becomes artistic expression: painted, broken apart, sown with nails. The perception of world events finds reflection in the 'Poetry of Destruction'—applied to the surface, driven into the ground, buried, visibly rendered in a dense poetic expression of signs and ciphers.*

Like many of Uecker's incisive works, these paintings are eminently ethical, considering themes of human violence, vulnerability, and political responsibility. To create them, Uecker stretched canvas atop thick pieces of wood, intuitively painting the surfaces in a highly physical, ritualistic, and visceral manner using thickly applied white paint. Formed on top of the painted surfaces are undulating patterns of nails (a material the artist has employed since the late 1950s) in differing configurations—some expansive and field-like, and others geometric and orderly. Uecker attacked the surfaces of the paintings—both from the front and verso—with an axe, creating violent and disruptive gashes in their meditative planes. For the artist, the absence of colour in his white monochrome works opens up a wealth of mystical possibilities. In his lecture 'White', held in 1965, Uecker defined the white space of his work as a 'space of spiritual existence', linked to the concept of the void; for Uecker, it represents a new world 'of silence beyond all screams'.<sup>1</sup>

*Verletzte Felder* also includes *Bäume aus einem Stamm (Trees from One Trunk)*, a work created between 2009 and 2015, which comprises three tree-like forms all originating from one large wood trunk. The individual 'trees' are covered in ash and nails, and evoke a frequent theme in Uecker's work—his long-term investigation into the complex relationship between nature and humanity, with an underlying message of healing and resurrection. The materials covering the trunks reference this cycle: in Uecker's work, the nail, frequently associated with piercing or violence, has opposite connotations. Here, nails sprouting from the tops of the tree trunks instantiate a new visual dimension, creating ever-changing arrangements of light and shadow. Ash, coating the rough tree bark, simultaneously represents death and evokes the sequence of life—'from dust to dust'—pointing to the possibility of rebirth.

## **About the Artist**

Günther Uecker was born in 1930 in Wendorf, Germany. He studied painting at the Kunsthochschule Berlin Weissensee from 1949 to 1953, and further pursued his artistic training in 1955 at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. Throughout the 1950s, Uecker cultivated a strong interest in repetitive practices and purification rituals, and became fascinated with the philosophies of Buddhism, Taoism, and Islam. He developed rituals of his own, including the lengthy, repetitive, meditative hammering of nails, and proceeded to translate this into his artistic practice. His nail-relief works exceed the limits of the two-dimensional plane and create a new realm for vision to explore the calculated patterns of light and shadow.

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<sup>1</sup> G. Uecker quoted in D. Honisch, *Uecker*, New York 1983, p. 26.

Uecker examined this effect further in the 1960s by introducing kinetic elements into his works through the use of engines, shifting his methodology from using precise, geometric patterns to more organic and irregular arrangements. In 1961, he joined the Zero Group founded by artists Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, who advocated for a new art form—a degree zero—to erase the destructive, violent forces by which human experience had come to be conditioned during the war, and which were expressed in the then-prevalent Art Informel style. The Zero Group made a large impact in the European postwar milieu, influencing a number of artists with similar ideas. Central to the movement were explorations of light, technology, and an expansion beyond traditional two-dimensional confines of the canvas, all of which are implicated in Uecker's work.

After the dissolution of the Zero Group in the mid-1960s, Uecker's work took a turn toward body, Conceptual, and Land art, and in the 1970s he designed stage sets for several operas. He taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1974 to 1995, and was promoted to professor in 1976. Uecker has been the recipient of numerous prestigious awards, such as the Staatspreis des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen in 2015. His work has been exhibited at museums around the world, including the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; the Budapest Museum of Fine Art, Budapest; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Ca' Pesaro, International Gallery of Modern Art, Venice; and the Belvedere Museum, Vienna. He has also participated in documenta, Kassel in 1964, 1968, and 1977, and the Venice Biennale in 1970. The artist's work is included in the collections of international institutions such as the Tate Modern, London; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Musée national d'art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; the Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice; and the Museum Ludwig, Cologne.

Recent exhibitions of Uecker's work include a large-scale retrospective at K20 am Grabbeplatz, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, in 2015; and a solo exhibition, *Tribute to Hafez*, at the Imam Ali (AS) Religious Arts Museum, Tehran, in 2016. He was featured prominently in the 2014–15 exhibition *ZERO: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s* at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York. Uecker's eight-panel painting *Weißer Bilder: Weiße Stelle (White Pictures: White Place)* (1992) was included in the Punta Della Dogana, Venice's exhibition *Accrochage*, in June 2016, and his seminal sculpture, *Chair (II)* (1963) is featured in the Museum of Modern Art, New York's recent reinstallation of their permanent collection. An exhibition of fourteen works related to *Verletzte Felder (Wounded Fields)* was recently on view at the Kunsthalle Rostock, Germany.