

galerie gmurzynska

# Otto Piene

## Rouge et noir

Galerie Gmurzynska  
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Galerie Gmurzynska is pleased to present *Rouge et Noir* an exhibition of works by Otto Piene (Bad Laasphe 1928–Berlin 2014), founder of Group Zero, lifelong pioneer of modern art, and key avant-garde figure of the second half of the twentieth century. Mirroring Piene's radical experimental creativity, the exhibition presents a selection of his painted ceramics, fire paintings, gouaches, raster paintings and light installations.

Otto Piene, *Die Geburt des Regenbogens (The Birth of the Rainbow)*, 1966, fire, smoke and oil on canvas



Otto Piene visionary work directed not just his close colleagues such as Günther Uecker, Heinz Mack, Yves Klein, Jean Tinguely, and Lucio Fontana, but also has been a continual inspiration for boundary pushing artists such as Olafur Eliasson and Tomás Saraceno. As Director of the Center for Advanced Visual Studies at MIT from 1974-93, Piene's expansive projects set the tone for public art in America and guided a generation of artists, including notably Nam June Paik.

The exhibition presents the most recent series of Otto Piene as well as works from the early part of the artist's career to offer a representative overview of his oeuvre. The painting *Die Geburt des Regenbogens (The birth of the rainbow, 1966)*, oil on canvas with fire and smoke, bears witness to the artist's constant use of fire and his dialog with the work of Yves Klein, his close friend and colleague. Fire became an art form for both Piene and Klein, who as children during war showed interest in turning destructive fire into the tool of painters; that creation might be a counterpoise to destruction. The fire of heaven becomes *Feuerorgel (Fire Organ, 1972)*, a painting of fire on cardboard in which Piene appears intent on depicting the heart of creation. This light from the sky, both sublime and worrying, also forms the basis for Piene's light installations. Light is a graphic element that lends the composition form and meaning. **"Light was the uniting, overarching element in the art that my friends and I made,"** explained the artist.

The artist used the title *Rouge et Noir* in several of his works and with multiple media, including painted ceramic, canvasses composed with oil and fire, and light installations, such as the one he showed in 2011 at the Grand Palais in Paris. *Rouge et Noir* was also the title of his ceramic exhibition at the Leopold-Hoesch-Museum in Düren in 2010. Echoing Stendhal's eponymous novel, red and black symbolize the passion and quest for the absolute in Piene's oeuvre. Red and black are also the colors of the fusion of matter, which you see standing in front of the kiln during the firing of ceramic. Like Miró, Piene turned to ceramics in the same post-war period to engage with the nature of material itself, with its *elements*, and to revisit an archaic practice, remembering the prehistoric artist who fashioned the raw material into a unique form and let it speak to us.

As Piene explained, **"In my ceramics the four elements come together: the flow of water, combined with the clay, later evaporated in the fire of the kiln and dried by the air"**. Revisiting the origins of art history to better rewrite it aptly describes the Zero mindset inspired by Piene. The resurgence of ceramic in contemporary art globally points to how visionary Piene was in returning to ceramic decades ago.

The exhibition is accompanied by a full catalogue with original essay from Jérôme Neutres, former director of the Réunion des musées nationaux-Grand Palais and former president of the Musée du Luxembourg, and Dr. Raimund Stecker, Professor at HBK Essen and former artistic director of the Lehmbruck-Museum in Duisburg.



Installation view, *Otto Piene: Rouge et Noir*, Galerie Gmurzynska New York, May 7-September 3, 2022

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