

Otto Piene

Alchemist and Stormer of the Skies

(17 March 2019 – 5 January 2020)



Otto Piene, Komet (Comet), 1973, More Sky Collection
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Press conference: Friday, 15 March 2019, 11 a.m.

Exhibition opening: Sunday, 17 March 2019, 11 a.m.

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Press information

»Otto Piene. Alchemist and Stormer of the Skies«

18 March 2019 until 5 January 2020

Press: Friday, 15 March 2019, 11 a.m.

Opening: Sunday, 17 March 2019, 11 a.m.

»Light is the first condition of all visibility. Light is the sphere of colour. Light is the vital principal of humankind and of the image. Each colour gains its quality through the amount of light it receives. Light accounts for the power and magic of the image, its wealth, its eloquence, its sensuality, its beauty.« **Otto Piene**

Light – the very basis of the artistic exploration of form and colour – as well as air and the cosmos with its stars are at the centre of this exhibition about Otto Piene. He was a leading co-founder of the ZERO movement in Dusseldorf in 1958, and as an experimental “artist / explorer” he in-depth examined the four elements. Piene’s work thus perfectly fits into the light-flooded rooms of the Arp Museum, whose architecture can be read as an anthem to the immaterial power of light. At the same time, in the artist’s biography there are certain links to the museum at Bahnhof Rolandseck. On the occasion of the great ZERO farewell party in 1966, he was a guest here together with Heinz Mack and Günther Uecker – after all, the Bahnhof had been an important venue for the Rhineland art scene since the 1960s. The Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, which in the “art year 2019” is dedicated to the theme of “Collections”, lives up this fact and – after K. O. Götz, Bernard Schultze, C. O. Paeffgen and Gotthard Graubner – honours another important contemporary artist with roots in the Rhineland.

»The universe has invited human beings of all eras to dream. Science and art have inspired great deeds. Here at the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck everyone can get to know the artistic experience of the universe thanks to Otto Piene. We owe this to the superb collection of Dr. Edgar Quadt – the More Sky Collection – with 47 works by Otto Piene. For the next eleven months they can be seen at Rolandseck together with loans from the Piene Estate, Elizabeth Goldring-Piene, the Kunstmuseen Krefeld, the Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf, the ZKM Karlsruhe, the Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein and Galerie Sprüth Magers. The “exhibition year 2019” at the Arp Museum will be devoted entirely to the theme of “Collections” and, with an eye to the museum’s own collections, to external collections hosted there, and to generous donations, demonstrates this essential aspect of a living museum«, **comments Prof. Dr. Konrad Wolf, Minister of Culture and Science of the State of Rhineland-Palatinate.**

As a member of the ZERO movement, Otto Piene (born 1928 in Bad Laasphe, died 2014 in Berlin) today ranks among the protagonists of abstraction after 1945. Throughout his life, he continued to develop his art further, as the exhibition illustrates with 63 canvases, graphic works, ceramics, light and air sculptures. Essential here is his transcending of the traditional boundaries of the artwork, striving towards a sensual experience of light and space. A recurring and key element is the circle – sometimes solitary, sometimes serial and in a grid. It is a symbol for the infinity of space, which is continued in references to the cosmos.

With one of his later »Inflatables«, an exhibition copy of the monumental air sculpture *Paris Star* from 2008, a large-format Piene work occupies the outside space of the museum. In the cabinet of the exhibition floor, visitors can experience the impressive light choreography of *Lichtraum (Jena)* from 2007. Selected works by Lucio Fontana expand the spectrum of the exhibition with an important mentor and artist of reference for Piene's work. On the floor of the Arp Collection, several works by Piene will be shown in a productive artistic dialogue with works by Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp.

Dr. Oliver Kornhoff, Director of the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, about the exhibition: *»The way how abstract art developed in the 20th century, based on modernism, in the work of artists such as Otto Piene is impressively demonstrated in the direct dialogue with the works of Fontana and our two house patrons. Otto Piene leaves behind a diverse and exciting oeuvre. We are extremely pleased to honour his art in its prolific scope now, more than 50 years after the magnificent ZERO finale, here at Rolandseck!«*

Light

While in the 1950s the individual, gestural expressivity of informal painting dominated abstract art, Otto Piene sought a more universal language. The work of art should not only be a painting or sculpture in the classical sense, it should open up an entire »space« – in the sense of a holistic experience. He developed the foundations for these artistic ideas in close collaboration with his colleagues Heinz Mack and Günther Uecker in Dusseldorf. By founding ZERO in 1958, they initiated an art movement that soon became internationally established.

One of the strong impulses in Otto Piene's works is the essence and effect of light, which becomes constitutive for his work, as he himself phrases it: *»And the light is there and pervades everything and it is not I who paints but the light.«*

»It determines his works, transforms their colours and surfaces, sets them in motion, enlivens them. Spaces become spherical places that mesmerize the viewers with their lucidity and their joy of playing«, explains **Jutta Mattern, curator of the exhibition**. *»So it is not surprising that he repeatedly and emphatically evokes the phenomenon of light and makes it the starting point for his philosophical reflections and his artistic work.«*

One example of this is the **light space** specially built for the exhibition, which allows visitors at Rolandseck to experience the light choreography of the light space (*Lichtraum Jena*) from 2007. Here, light presents itself as the creator of the artwork: moving light incides through perforated walls. At the same time, three devices are positioned in the room, which set

themselves in motion in coordinated sequences and make the light dance across the walls. It is these light-kinetic works by Piene that he developed at the beginning of the 1960s, which enable the viewers to perceive themselves as part of a cosmic order.

Piene already undertook his first examinations on the subject of light in his **grid pictures** at the end of the 1950s. In order to manifest the phenomena of light in a painterly way, he deliberately exchanged the brush for half-tone screens, which became a fundamental mechanical instrument in the creation of his smoke drawings, his light graphics and later also his ceramics.

For his light compositions Piene mostly used bright, well reflecting oil and aluminium colours. This range of colours includes white, yellow, gold and silver. According to its symbolic meaning, gold is considered a symbol of the sun and the divine principle; yellow stands for sunlight. For the alchemists of the Middle Ages, gold was solidified light, silver was reminiscent of the lustre of the moon and stars or the surface of water. In his work Piene follows this **cosmological aesthetics and symbolism of material**.

Fire

Piene's fire pictures with their titles partly borrowed from cosmology were created at the beginning of the 1960s. They are realised in many variations of colour and technique on canvas and paper and tell of his fascination with a cosmic world and its formation. Hence, he sprays a circle onto the canvas with black paint spray and then works on it with fixatives to increase its combustibility. He ignites this surface, lifts the canvas and moves it back and forth in different directions at different angles of inclination, blows into the flames, fuels them – until he finally terminates the creative process and extinguishes the flames by vigorously blowing them out.

Frequently cracks, crusts and bubbles appear on the coat of paint, the coating dissolves, a highly explosive mixture is formed, which spreads across the canvas in splashes. Sometimes it is not possible to control the flames and find the right moment to extinguish them. Sometimes the fire destroys the original motif and the picture surface. Fire and smoke thus become »painting instruments«. *»It is always a question of a transfer of energies, a transformation of matter. In this, the circle also plays an important role, as the shape of planets such as the sun and the moon and as a cosmic form, representing infinity and perfection«*, curator Jutta Mattern says.

Air

Diametrically opposed to earth are **Piene's Inflatables**, which are counted among his *Sky Art* projects and which gained special attention from 1964 onwards when he moved to the USA. These air-filled sculptures, made of spinnaker cloth and with additional air tubes, star-like conquer the sky. In the same way as light, air is of fundamental importance to Piene's work, an artistic expression of his fascination with the universe and a means of expanding his ideas into space.

For the white *Inflatable Paris Star*, installed on the outside of Meier's museum building and originally shown in Paris in 2008, a copy was sewn especially for the Rolandseck exhibition. This extremely light creation, about 7 m high and 7 m wide, is filled with air at rhythmic intervals, only to collapse again after a certain time. This is the first time that an *Inflatable* can be seen over such a long period of time independently of a Sky Event.

Earth / Clay

»He always worked highly concentrated, two to three hours, taking his coat off and then it immediately began, every few weeks, when he came over from the USA. (...) Nice working with him, it was a lot of fun. Highly respectful, a real personality.« This is how Niels Dietrich, owner of the workshop for sculpture and specialist for ceramics in the fine arts and architecture, describes the collaboration with Otto Piene.

In the exhibition, varied **reliefs and sculptures** represent Piene's ceramic oeuvre. He describes his *grid and pit ceramics*, which were created in collaboration with Niels Dietrich in Cologne, as »heavy pictures«. Serving as a basis were clay slabs of various sizes, prefabricated by the ceramics workshop and from a clay pit in the Westerwald. The sensual, tactile surfaces of the *pit ceramics*, for the most part without glaze, appear very coarse, while the finer grid ceramics feature linearly rhythmic sequences of circle and dot formations. With its erratic shiny platinum surface and the silvery grey tone underneath, the structure of the work *Kleiner Urknall* (Little Big Bang) 2006) is reminiscent of the solidified flashes of light of an explosion. Piene's *Hemisphären* (2006), on the other hand, shows numerous small holes in the sculptural elevations. With their coloured surfaces, partially covered with precious metal, they visualize transformations owed to the firing process of over 1,040 degrees Celsius in the kiln.

Hence, Piene's ceramics are always the result of a **transformation process**. Just as in his fire pieces the active elements were fire and air, here all four elements are involved: fire, water, earth and air. They transform the originally soft material of clay into a solid body and enliven the surfaces with colourings by liquefying the glazes and metals – and solidifying them again. The fire canvases, just like the fired ceramics, are united by a metamorphic process, in which the artist intervenes like an alchemist in the compound of material and colour by using the energy of fire.

Lucio Fontana

This cosmos of Otto Piene's works in the exhibition is joined by works of the Italian-Argentine artist Lucio Fontana (1899 – 1968). Fontana was an **important companion of Otto Piene, but also of the other members of the ZERO group**. He was admired by them for the way he radically revolutionized painting and sculpture, and he was an essential initiator for their individual and collective work. Piene, Uecker and Mack also showed their admiration at documenta III in 1964 with the kinetic light space *Hommage à Fontana* dedicated to Lucio Fontana and with a planned banquet in honour of him, which was to take place in 1966 or 1967 in the ceremonial hall at Bahnhof Rolandseck. However, the end of the movement and the ZERO farewell party in 1966 at Rolandseck, thwarted this plan.

From 1947 onwards, Fontana developed ideas on colour, sound, space, movement and time and summarised them in five manifestos for the concept of *Spazialismo*. In 1949, he finally created his sculptural paintings, which belong to the series of works called *Buchi* (Holes). His works selected for this exhibition are confined to this very period, since the circle motif finds a correspondence in Piene's works. Both artists preferred to work with glazed ceramics, with metals, and developed site-specific light installations. Both of them placed the parameters of space, light, and movement at the centre of their art. They thus redefined the classical concept of the work in favour of a sensual experience that takes place in a continuum of time and space.

Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp

We show Otto Piene's intellectual connections to classical modernism in a dialogical juxtaposition of some of his works with those by Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp as part of the presentation of our collection. Parallels can be found both in the literary work of Hans Arp and in the painterly and sculptural works of these two pioneers of abstraction.

Hans Arp thus writes that their works *»(...) point into the vastness, into the depth, into infinity«*. As to Sophie Taeuber's circle compositions he phrases: *»(...) She has painted the golden ray bones of the stars. (...) She made the dots grow into berries into giant fruits into suns. She let the dots fall to ashes. She has sown pearls in white beds and grew moons from them (...) In this world, top and bottom, brightness and darkness, eternity and transience exist in perfect equilibrium. And so the circle was complete.«*

While Hans Arp repeatedly depicts the moving oval or the navel, and Otto Piene the biomorphic circle, **Sophie Taeuber-Arp** consistently elevates the geometric circle to a key motif. She arranges it, divides it, makes it balance and dance on lines, and grow into the third dimension as a cone, cylinder or sphere, or uses it as a base plate for reliefs. She understands the circle as a pure form, which, like Otto Piene, she *»frees«* from imaging parameters and allows it to float freely, following its own rhythm.

And so the circle in this exhibition is complete, a cosmos in which Otto Piene, Lucio Fontana, Sophie Taeuber-Arp and Hans Arp meet and in their different ways shape the earthly world with their art. With Otto Piene, the show presents an artist who dares a lot, who is eager to experiment, who radically develops new technical and artistic ideas, and who is always interested in collaborating with others – fellow artists and thinkers. With the biographical reference to the ZERO farewell party at Bahnhof Rolandseck, it finds an ideal venue on the light-flooded floors of the Richard Meier Building.

The exhibition is developed in collaboration with the More Sky Collection, Dr. Edgar Quadt, the Otto Piene Estate and Galerie Sprüth Magers.

The Catalogue

The catalogue (German/English) published by Oliver Kornhoff and designed by Franziska Nast, with texts by Astrid von Asten, Chogakate Kazarian, Barbara Könches, Heinz Mack, Jutta Mattern, Anabel Runge / Niels Dietrich, Tomás Saraceno and Stephan von Wiese, as well as with poems by Hans Arp and Elizabeth Goldring-Piene, will be published with exhibition views on 10 April 2019 on the occasion of Art Cologne.

Number of art works:

53 works by Otto Piene

8 works by Lucio Fontana

2 works by Lothar Wolleh

Lenders:

Otto Piene:

More Sky Collection

Kunstmuseen Krefeld

Museum Kunstpalast Düsseldorf

Piene Estate

Galerie Sprüth Magers

Kunstmuseum Liechtenstein

ZKM Zentrum für Kunst und Medien Karlsruhe

Lucio Fontana:

Tate

Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza

Sammlung Rira

Sammlung Lenz Schönberg

Elisabeth Goldring-Piene

Galerie Almine Rech

Mazzoleni Art

Robilant+Voena

Lothar Wolleh:

Dr. Oliver Wolleh

Sponsors



**Gesellschaft der Freunde und Förderer |
arp museum Bahnhof Rolandseck**

General Information

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Opening hours: Tuesday to Sunday and public holidays 11.00 – 18.00

Admission: adults, all exhibitions: 9 Euro, concessions: 7 Euro
Station building only: 4 Euro, concessions 2 Euro

The complete programme: www.arpmuseum.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/arpmuseumbahnhofrolandseck

Twitter (#arpmuseum)

Instagram (#arpmuseum)

PRESS MATERIAL on the homepage of the Arp Museum at:

<http://arpmuseum.org/museum/ueber-uns/presse.html>

Press photos

»Otto Piene. Alchemist and Stormer of the Skies«

17 March 2019 until 5 January 2020



Hemisphäre Platin (Hemisphere Platinum) | Otto Piene | 2007
More Sky Collection | © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019 | Photo: Christian Altengarten



Komet (Comet) | Otto Piene | 1973 | More Sky Collection | © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

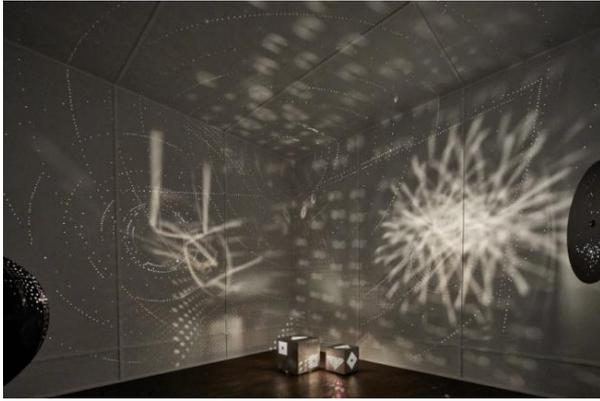


Die Geburt des Regenbogens (The Birth of the Rainbow) | Otto Piene | 1973
| More Sky Collection |
© VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2019



Bausch (Wad) | Otto Piene | 1998 | More Sky Collection | © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn, 2019

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Lichtraum (Jena) (Light Space – Jena),
(installation view) | Otto Piene | 2007 | ©
VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019 | Photo: Mick
Vincenz



Paris Star (exhibition view) | Otto Piene |
2008 (exhibition copy 2019) |
© Otto Piene Estate / Sprüth Magers |
Photo: Mick Vincenz



Otto Piene working with fire |
Photo and © Peter Müller / BILD

arp museum Bahnhof Rolandseck



Exhibition view

Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck |
Richard Meier Building | Ground floor |
South room | Photo: Mick Vincenz



Exhibition view

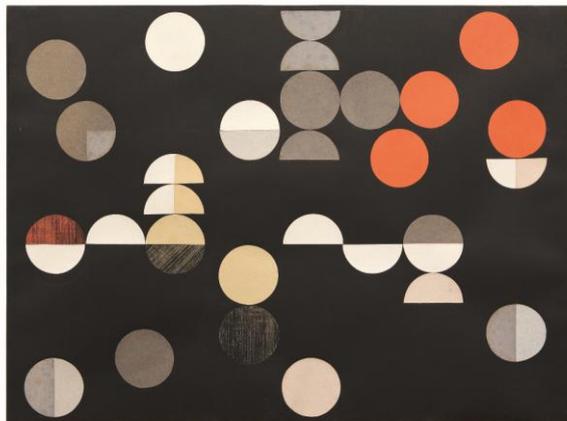
Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck |
Richard Meier Building | Ground floor |
North room | Photo: Mick Vincenz



Copper Play (light piece) | Otto Piene |
2011 | Photo: Mick Vincenz



Spheres | Lucio Fontana | 1957 | Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche Faenza (MIC) | © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019



Komposition mit Kreisen und Halbkreisen (Composition of Circles and Semicircles) | Sophie Taeuber-Arp | 1938 | Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck | Photo: Mick Vincenz

Exhibition overview 2019/20

until 28 April 2019

Arp Collection 2018:
**»I cut up mountains of paper in a
great frenzy«**
New Building, upper floor

Theme year 2019 »Collection«

10 Feb 2019

AufDADAtakt

10 Feb until 8 Sept 2019

**In the Light of the Medici. Baroque
Art of Italy**
The Haukohl Family Collection
European Tour
Pavilion

10 Feb until 5 May 2019

Shaping the Future
**Scholars of the Künstlerhaus Schloss
Balmoral and the federal state of
Rhineland-Palatinate**
Bahnhof (Station building)

17 Mar 2019 until 5 Jan 2020

Otto Piene.
Alchemist and Stormer of the Skies
New Building, ground floor

26 May 2019 until 5 Jan 2020

Collages. The Meerwein Collection
Third Cutout
Bahnhof / Station building

26 May 2019 until 5 Jan 2020

**Arp Collection 2019: »Nature is a
petrified magic city«**
New Building, upper floor

22 Sept 2019 until 5 Jan 2020

Art Chamber Rau
The Four Elements
Pavilion

Arp Collection 2018

»I cut up mountains of paper in a great frenzy«

until 28 April 2019



Hans Arp, Nächtliche Gaukelei (nocturnal jugglery), 1962 (collage), Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2018, Photo: Mick Vincenz

Paper works occupy a special position in Hans Arp's oeuvre, for with no other medium he deals in such a varied manner. Again and again he explores its limits and arrives at new possible uses. Arp not only draws and produces colourful prints, but he also tears and sticks, paints, cuts and creases – giving the paper a third dimension.

The principles of his organic abstraction – metamorphosis, constellation and coincidence, borrowed from nature – become vivid everywhere in the presentation of the collection. Arp's spontaneity and his boundless joy in experimenting become particularly tangible in his handling of paper.

In the Light of the Medici. Baroque Art of Italy The Haukohl Family Collection European Tour

10 February 2019 until 8 September 2019



Felice Ficherelli, St Sebastian Cured by St Irene, 17th century, © Haukohl Family Collection, Photo: Tom Lucas / MNHA Luxembourg

Starting off the year at the Kunstammer Rau, there is a special kind of convention of collections: 34 paintings from the American Haukohl Collection, probably the most important private collection of Florentine Baroque painting outside Italy, currently on a European tour are visiting Rolandseck. It comprises allegories, religious motifs, genre scenes and portraits. At the heart of the collection are the paintings by the Dandini family of artists, who served the Medici across generations.

These and other masterpieces by Jacopo da Empoli, Giovanni Domenico Ferretti and Felice Ficherelli meet with a wealth of Italian art treasures from the Rau Collection for UNICEF, including paintings and sculptures by Giovanni Angelo da Montorsoli, Carlo Dolci and Giovanni Battista Caracciolo.

In Florence, the development of the arts and sciences was closely linked to the rise and fall of the Medici dynasty. A long period of peace, a thriving economy and a stable structure of state and power allowed the arts to prosper. The Medici used their court artists as well as their art collection in the sense of a strategic cultural policy.

At the Accademia delle Arti del Disegno, founded in 1563 by Cosimo I de Medici, the focus lay on drawing and nude studies. Surfaces, soft skin and precious materials were masterfully

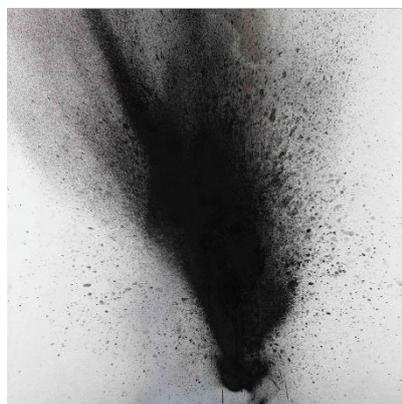
captured. Owing to expressive gestures and facial play as well as sensual allure, the figures still speak directly to us today. Another special feature are the opulent, partly original baroque frames, which the Haukohl family brought together especially for the painting collection.

The gathered works are ambassadors of a time in which the powerful of this world defined themselves through their love for art. This connects the Medici with the Haukohl family of collectors and with Gustav Rau, who continue this vital socio-political role of privately collecting art to the present day.

»In the Light of the Medici. Baroque Art of Italy« is an exhibition by the Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck in cooperation with the Musée national d'histoire et d'art Luxembourg acting as coordinator and initiator.

Otto Piene. Alchemist and Stormer of the Skies

17 Mar 2019 until 5 Jan 2020



Otto Piene, Komet (comet), 1973, More Sky Collection, © VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2019

As a co-founder of the ZERO movement in Dusseldorf in 1958, Otto Piene (1928-2014) is one of the protagonists of international abstraction after 1945. On the occasion of the great ZERO farewell party in 1966, Piene himself already was a guest at Rolandseck, which is why we are particularly pleased to pay tribute to his work here. Piene continued to develop his art throughout his life, as the exhibition shows by means of 60 or so canvases, ceramics and light works. Central to Piene's oeuvre is the crossing of traditional

boundaries of works and moving towards the sensual experience of light and space. This sensuality is achieved in the abstract grid and fire pictures as well as in the ceramics by specifically treating the surfaces in terms of colour, structure and relief. In various groups of works one connecting element becomes apparent: the circle – a formal constant and at the same time a symbol for the infinity of space. Piene carries this symbolism forward with references to the cosmos, the firmament and the stars.

The cosmic references can be found in his work titles and, above all, can be experienced in the specially reconstructed Lichtraum Jena (light space Jena) from 2007. As a symbolic conquest of the sky, one of the famous inflatables expands the Rolandseck exhibition into the outside space. In particular through the idea of art that can be experienced in space, a distinct proximity to Lucio Fontana (1899-1968) becomes apparent, the founder of the Spazialismo, whom Otto Piene greatly appreciated. The parallels between the two in terms of their artistic sense are illustrated by a small selection of Fontana's works, which are shown in dialogue with those of Piene. In addition, surprising references to the works of Hans Arp and Sophie Taeuber-Arp visualise Otto Piene's roots in modern abstraction.

The exhibition is developed as a collaboration between the More Sky Collection, Dr. Edgar Quadt, the Otto Piene Estate and the Sprüth Magers gallery.

Arp Collection 2019: »Nature is a petrified magic city«

26 May 2019 until 5 Jan 2020



View of Arp's studio in Meudon at the end of the 1950s

© VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2018 Photo: Ernst Scheidegger © Stiftung Ernst Scheidegger-Archiv

Following the presentation of Arp's reliefs and works on paper, in 2019 the focus will be on the creative process of his biomorphic sculptures. Exciting insights into artisanal methods have been passed down to us first of all through his own retrospective depictions and descriptions of his artist friends. In particular, the studio as a place of artistic creation will be illuminated. Plaster models, tools and casting moulds bring to

life the process of creation for the visitors. In addition to the actual works – made of bronze, wood, limestone, marble and cement – there are above all numerous photographs that provide access.

In addition to early documentations of his work with plaster sculptures in the garden of the studio house in Meudon, the impressive photo cycle by Ernst Scheidegger (1923 – 2016) offers the most comprehensive picture of his working places. He accompanied Arp during his work on the monumental outdoor sculpture »Wolkenhirte« (cloud shepherd) in the mid-1950s and also captures the atmosphere of the studio situation near Paris. Although the studio is the real place of his work, Arp's intellectual studio throughout his life remains the »great workshop of nature«, and he preserved the romantic view of a dreamer.

Art Chamber Rau: The Four Elements

22 September 2019 until 5 January 2020



Johann Martin von Rhoden, Die Kaskade von Tivoli (the cascade of Tivoli), 1825
Arp Museum Bahnhof Rolandseck / Rau Collection for UNICEF

Closely linked to the parallel exhibition »Otto Piene. Alchemist and Skystormer«, the second Rau exhibition of the year 2019 themed »Collections« is devoted to the four elements – earth, fire, water and air. Drawing on exquisite paintings from the Rau Collection for UNICEF in dialogue with award-winning photographs from the UNICEF »Photo of the Year« competition, the show goes searching for traces in history and explores what is holding the world together.

It follows philosophers, physicians and alchemists from the Middle Ages to the present day and enquires after the balance between the primordial essences that permeate our environment, but also mankind. Since ancient times it was believed that a disturbance of this elementary balance would endanger the macrocosm as well as the microcosm, the environment as well as man, and make him ill.

And thus the exhibition oscillates between the perfect world of an exuberant baroque still life by Frans Snyders and the flood image by Claude Monet, which already announces climate change.