

Press release

Günther Uecker

Verletztes Feld

2—31 October 2026

Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Marais
7, rue Debelleye, 75003 Paris



Günther Uecker, *Verletztes Feld*, 1981. Nails on canvas mounted on a wooden panel, 180 x 180 x 10 cm (70.87 x 70.87 x 4 in)

*In the beginning was the nail, which seemed to me to be the ideal object
with which to model light and shadow – to make time visible.*

— Günther Uecker

Verletztes Feld (Wounded Field) at Thaddaeus Ropac
Paris Marais presents the eponymous 1981 painting by
the German artist Günther Uecker (1930–2025), made
using his signature medium: nails. The work is cleft open

with an axe, marking the earliest known occurrence of
this defining gesture in Uecker's oeuvre. Alongside it,
a series of 22 painted photographs – the fruit of a col-
laboration between Swiss photographer Rolf Schröter's

images and Uecker's brushstrokes – retraces the making of *Verletztes Feld*.

The surface of *Verletztes Feld* is a dense, irregular bed of nails. As the light moves, the metal protrusions cast shifting shadows across it, recalling a sundial: not only measuring light and shape but also rendering visible the passage of time. This sense of mutation and motion builds on the work he produced over the course of his involvement in the ZERO group from 1957 to 1966: as the artist explained, 'what is important to me is variability, which is capable of revealing the beauty of movement to us.' Extending beyond the canvas, the nails break the two-dimensional boundary and enter the viewer's space. 'A particularly characteristic aspect of these nails', explains Kazuhiro Yamamoto, 'is the fact that they address our



Günther Uecker, *Entwicklung eines Werkes. Fotoumwandlungen (Bildrituale)*, 1981. Finger painting on baryta print, 61 x 51 cm (24.02 x 20.08 in).

sense of direction; in other words, they point from the artist to the world, or from the work of art itself to the viewer': reversing the directional interchange between the two players.

Each nail is driven into a canvas – stretched over a wooden panel – which Uecker painted with his bare hands. Bypassing the areas to be nailed, he created 'vortexes and spirals' with his palms and fingers within the white paint. The ascetic colour is symbolic of the artist's own psychological state as he works: one freed of all conscious thought, where his body becomes a conduit for direct communication with his medium. White is purity; ointment on a wound; 'the epitome of light' and 'triumph over darkness'. Splitting the work along its vertical axis with an axe, Uecker forms a composition that simultaneously evokes the Fontanian gesture and



Günther Uecker, *Entwicklung eines Werkes. Fotoumwandlungen (Bildrituale)*, 1981. Finger painting on baryta print, 61 x 51 cm (24.02 x 20.08 in).

the spine of an open book. *Verletztes Feld* represents the first documented instance of this foundational motif in the artist's oeuvre. The rupture remains open-ended: at once a laceration and a site of healing through which light might creep, ominous yet meditative. The act is one of destruction but also, inherently, of creation or genesis: as Uecker put it, 'mountains and childbirth are also immense. Without violence, we would not be able to bring ourselves into being.'

'There have been only very few artists whose work has reflected the issues of their respective times as consistently, from the outset to the present, as that



Günther Uecker, *Entwicklung eines Werkes. Fotoumwandlungen (Bildrituale)*, 1981. Finger painting on baryta print, 61 x 51 cm (24.02 x 20.08 in).



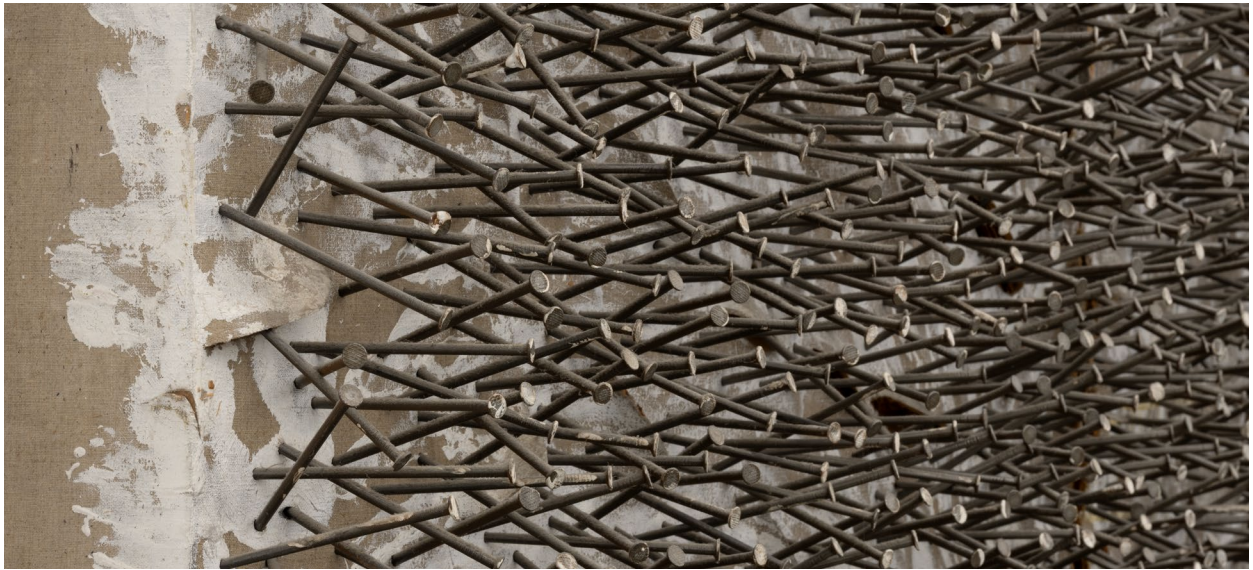
Günther Uecker, *Verletztes Feld*, installation view, Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais, 2026
Photo: Nicolas Brasseur

of Günther Uecker', writes curator Alexander Tolnay. Profoundly connected to the world, in the 1980s, Uecker reflected the growing human threat to both our environment and to humanity itself through increasingly irregular, ravaged artistic interventions which speak to a new intensity of emotion. As Jacob Uecker, the artist's son, writes: 'Uecker utilizes his own body as a medium to apply the paint onto the canvas. His hands reach across the borders of the picture plane, transcending it. A portrait of the artist worked over with nails as a chasm tears the canvas apart. The axe creating a wound that he pacifies with white paint. The endangerment of humans through humans. A universal theme, a shared human experience. He places the works within a continuous process of violation and connection. This ritualistic performance, a snapshot of the artist, is intended as a starting point for the viewer's sensory experience of being and existence'.

Accompanying the painting is a series of 22 painted photographs – the fruit of a collaboration between Uecker and Rolf Schröter – retracing the making of *Verletztes Feld*. Taken by Schröter in his Zürich photography studio, the photographs form a chronological documentation of the latter's choreographic, even

ritualistic process. Uecker individually overpainted or perforated each print, rendering them unique. Usually housed together in a wooden case – whose lid is a further, smaller nail relief – the photographs are displayed at Thaddaeus Ropac Paris Marais alongside *Verletztes Feld*, which is the only known painting by the artist to have a work of this kind dedicated to the process of its creation. Presented alongside it, the photographs become an extension of the painting.

Replacing the traditional paintbrush with multiple direct approaches to the canvas – from the onslaught of vehement gestures undertaken with nails or an axe to the caress of his own paint-covered hands – Uecker redefines not only the artwork but the very act of artmaking. In the artist's words: 'Emotions transform into gestures, into artistic actions – they become visible and form a field, like cropland, tilled and furrowed, nailed, planted.' For Uecker, the artwork and the embodied act of its creation to which the photographs bear witness are inseparable, and he considered his paintings 'a poetic concentration of myself'. Uecker's 'wounded field' of nails – lush with crop yet overcast with shadow – forms a metaphor for the body, as well as for the world we live in.



Günther Uecker, *Verletztes Feld* (detail), 1981. Nails on canvas mounted on a wooden panel, 180 x 180 x 10 cm (70.87 x 70.87 x 4 in)

About the artist

Born in Wendorf, Germany in 1930, Günther Uecker studied at the Fachschule für angewandte Kunst in Wismar, the Kunsthochschule Berlin-Weißensee, and the Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf under Otto Pankok. He created his first nail object in 1955–56, and the ritual of hammering nails would accompany him throughout his career, relating to his memories of nailing planks over the windows and doors of his home to deter Soviet troops after the Second World War. In 1961, he joined the ZERO group alongside Heinz Mack and Otto Peine. Starting from an aesthetic ‘zero point’, the ZERO artists, alongside other associated artists such as Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni and Jean Tinguely, employed light and motion to open up new forms of perception. During the years that followed, Uecker’s work featured in exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (1961, 1962); the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels (1962); and the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1965).

ZERO concluded its active collaboration following a final exhibition at the Kunstmuseum in Bonn (1966). In the years that followed, Uecker created films, actions and monumental installations in the public space, and set designs for several operas, all while developing his pictorial and sculptural practices. Among his public commissions are the four-panel nail relief installation *From Darkness to Light* at the United Nations, Geneva (1978) and the *Reflection and Prayer Room* at the Reichstag, Berlin (1998–99). Uecker participated in documenta in Kassel in 1964, 1968 and 1977, and represented West Germany

at the 35th Venice Biennale in 1970. He taught at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf from 1976 to 1995.

His work has been the subject of exhibitions at Staatliche Kunsthalle Baden-Baden (1968); Moderna Museet, Stockholm (1971); Kunstmuseum, Düsseldorf (1975); Museum Folkwang, Essen (1975); Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart (1976); Nationalgalerie, Berlin (1982); Kunsthalle, Düsseldorf (1983); Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna (1992); Hungarian National Museum, Budapest (1993); Palazzo delle Esposizioni, Rome (1995); Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Santiago de Chile (1996); Museu de Arte Moderna, Rio de Janeiro (1996); Gropius-Bau, Berlin (2003 and 2005); Taipei Fine Arts Museum (2003); Museum Küppersmühle für Moderne Kunst, Duisburg (2005); National Museum of China, Beijing (2007); Ca’ Pesaro International Gallery of Modern Art, Venice (2012); Musée d’Art Moderne, Saint-Etienne (2012); Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest (2012); Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, Havana (2014); Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2015); and Staatliches Museum Schwerin (2020), among others.

Uecker’s work is held in the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago; Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Tate, London.

For any enquiries:

Marcus Rothe
Thaddaeus Ropac Paris
marcus.rothe@ropac.net
Telephone +33 1 42 72 99 00
Mobile +33 6 76 77 54 15



Share your thoughts with:

@thaddaeusropac
#thaddaeusropac
#guntheruecker

All images © Günther Uecker / Adagp, Paris, 2026
Photos: Nicolas Brasseur