

PRESS RELEASE ZERO FOUNDATION IN AUGUST 2026

herman de vries – zero is the gate

Solo exhibition of the Dutch ZERO artist at the ZERO house

The art of herman de vries thrives on his keen observation of nature and his aesthetic curiosity. Whether it be people, places or vegetation, everything has its own significance, without the artist feeling the need to interpret it. As he himself says: "these are all 'factual materials', genuine zero works. nothing has been added, apart from the titles."



herman de vries, photo: katharina winterhalter

► **Opening:** August 27, 2026, 6 p.m.,
ZERO house, Hüttenstraße 104,
40215 Düsseldorf, Germany

► **Welcome address:**

Miriam Koch, Councillor for Culture, Integration and Health for the City of Düsseldorf;
Heinz Mack, artist, co-founder of ZERO and longtime friend;
Hannah Tijmes, Consul General of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Düsseldorf

► **Guided tour in dialogue:**

Barbara Könches, director of the ZERO Foundation and curator of the exhibition, and
katharina winterhalter, author and studio director herman de vries

► **Exhibition:**

- **Duration:** August 29 until October 24, 2026
- **Opening hours:** Saturdays from 12.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.
- Opening hours during the **DC Open** on Saturday, September 5, 2026 and Sunday, September 6, 2026, from 12.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m.
- **Free public guided tour** on Saturday, September 5, 2026, at 11 a.m. with Barbara Könches and on Saturday, October 3, 2026, at 11 a.m. with Sarah Spörer

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herman de vries, *journal „from a trip to imessouane“*, 2011. Figure: Bruno Schneyer

How many plants are there in 0.16 m²? Would you have guessed that there are 473 different plants? The Dutch artist herman de vries – who has used only lowercase letters for over 70 years – found these plants in an area of 16 dm², collected them, dried them, and carefully placed each one on a sheet of plastic. The work *16 dm² - an essay*, 1975/76, fills an entire wall and shows us – like an exploded view – the diversity of Earth’s habitat, which we trample underfoot every day, both recklessly and thoughtlessly.

Since his artistic beginnings in the late 1950s, herman de vries has had an eye for the beauty of nature, which he presents to us in a purist manner, without embellishment. After a hailstorm in 1978, he collected 20 leaves from his apple tree, each showing different types of damage from the hailstones. As identical as the genetic material may be, the wounds caused by the environment are just as diverse.

We hardly notice the *unterfränkischen sandstein* (Lower Franconian Sandstone) – which sometimes adorns a house facade in a deep red and at other times in a pale yellow – as we walk by, until it lies before us in an exhibit consisting of 21 rectangles of equal sized but varying colors.

herman de vries’ art lives from his keen observation of nature and his aesthetic curiosity. Whether it be people, places or vegetation, everything has its own significance, without the artist feeling the need to interpret it. As he himself says: “these are all ‘factual materials’, genuine zero works. nothing has been added, apart from the titles.”

During his many travels, de vries gained insights into a wide variety of cultural and natural environments, which are documented in his journals.

The *journal "from a trip to imessouane"*, 2011, features 17 panels depicting plants, stones, shells, and artifacts that herman and susanne de vries found with Marion Reissner on February 9, 2011, during a stay in Imessouane, a coastal town in Morocco.

Arranged like a scientific tableau and evenly distributed across sheets of paper measuring 35 x 25 cm, the shapes and colors of the found objects evoke a magical poetry all their own. The objet trouvé has been well known in art since Marcel Duchamp's famous *Fountain* (1917) and the Surrealists' ready-made, yet hardly anyone has managed to visualize the contradiction that lies in the sensory richness of the material and the deliberate omission of a message. What herman de vries – who turned ninety-five on July 11, 2026 – wants to convey is vividly illustrated by *transit/vergänglichkeitswerke II* (Transit/ Works On Transience), 1980 : A daily newspaper – in this case, the "Haßfurter Tagblatt" – is left in the garden for one, two, three, four, or five months. In a display case, we now see five copies of the newspaper, just as the natural, organic processes of decomposition left the printed paper behind.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, whose *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* de vries loves so much, writes: "At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena." (6.371) One would like to read the slim *Tractatus* a second time, holding it in one's hands while referring to the illustrated encyclopedia of de vries.

Biography herman de vries



herman de vries and Heinz Mack, 2015, photo: Franziska Megert

herman de vries, born in 1931 in Alkmaar (Netherlands), lives and works in Eschenau, Lower Franconia (Germany). From 1961 to 1968, he was employed as a botanist at the Institute for



Applied Biological Research in Nature, Arnhem (Netherlands). He has been active as an artist since the 1950s and has been closely associated with the NUL Group (Armando, Jan Henderikse, Henk Peeters, Jan Schoonhoven) since 1962. His art has been shown in numerous solo and group exhibitions. In 2015, de vries represented the Kingdom of the Netherlands at the Venice Biennale. In 2025, he was awarded the title of "Knight in the Order of the Netherlands Lion." herman de vries and Heinz Mack have been friends since their time together in the ZERO avant-garde movement.

Press photos

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The project is financially supported by the Kingdom of the Netherlands.



ZERO foundation

ZERO was a new beginning: a conscious break with convention. Taking ZERO as a starting point, Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker began challenging traditional art in the late 1950s. In the span of just under a decade, what began in Dusseldorf soon evolved into one of the most significant avant-garde movements of the 20th century; a movement which – together with groups created around the same time and other fellow artists in Italy, France, Belgium and the Netherlands – continues to influence art to this day.

In 2008, approximately 50 years later, Heinz Mack, Otto Piene and Günther Uecker, in cooperation with the Stiftung Museum Kunstpalast, founded the ZERO foundation as a non-profit foundation under civil law in Dusseldorf. The artists contributed works of art and archive materials such as photographs, correspondence, invitation cards, drafts, posters and exhibition reviews to the foundation.

As an academic research centre with connections around the world, the ZERO foundation is concerned with the preservation, history, presentation and contextualisation of ZERO art and the ZERO movement. To date, exhibitions took place at the Hyogo Prefectural Museum of Art in Kobe, Japan; the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York, USA; Martin-Gropius-



Bau in Berlin, Germany; the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands; the Pohang Museum of Steel Art in Pohang, Republic of Korea and at the Institut Valencià d'Art Modern (IVAM) in Valencia, Spain.

The ZERO foundation publishes the results of its research in its own publications. Since 2018, the ZERO foundation has organised presentations, film screenings and exhibitions in the ZERO house in Düsseldorf.

Press contact

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