

In July 1965, Dutch newspapers reported the first rumors about an unusual art manifestation on Scheveningen pier called “Zero on Sea.” It would launch on September 23rd and last three weeks. “Zero on Sea” was to be a huge art event with about 50 participating artists from over ten countries. These included Lucio Fontana from Milan, Yayoi Kusama and George Rickey from New York, Günther Uecker from Düsseldorf, Jiro Yoshihara from Tokyo, Walter Leblanc from Belgium, Pol Bury and Armand from France, Jesús Rafael Soto from Venezuela and, of course, the Dutch Nul group, consisting of Armando, Henk Peeters, Jan Henderikse and Jan Schoonhoven. It was to be a happening in which the public would play an active role: “For once, it doesn’t need to approach art in a breathless whisper.” In true ZERO spirit, the plans involved all the elements. Yves Klein’s *climate room* was to be executed posthumously; a world premiere, the press boasted, which might remain permanently in place. Yayoi Kusama wanted to adorn a 30-m-long corridor with her phallic objects, famous from the Nul65 Stedelijk Museum exhibition earlier that year. Armando “annexed” the noises of the sea in order to amplify these and broadcast them all over the pier; also, he wished to “paint the sea black,” a recollection of his 1964 Black Water project. There were plans to launch ZERO fireworks, and to involve smell in some kind of way. The initiator of the project was Reinder Zwolsman. His Exploitatie Maatschappij Scheveningen (EMS) was the owner of the pier and needed some publicity. In early 1965, the EMS got in touch with Leo Verboon of Internationale Gallerij Orez and Dutch Nul artist Henk Peeters. Initially, the organizers estimated the costs at no more than 100,000 guilders. Half of that sum would be provided by EMS. Companies that

produced materials with which ZERO artists liked to work were to sponsor the remainder. Five thousand visitors were expected daily. Unfortunately, “Zero on Sea” was never realized. From the outset, it was questionable whether the high-flying constructions of the international ZERO artists would be able to withstand the harsh Dutch climate; in early April 1966, when the event was finally meant to take place, storms ravaged the North Sea coast. No insurance against possible claims in case of damage could be obtained. But Verboon mentioned another reason: “When we had collected all those plans, we started to calculate: the whole affair was going to cost several hundred thousand guilders. And Zwolsman was much more bankrupt than he realized, at that moment in time, so all we got out of him was a tiny amount of money.” He was only too right: in 1966, the EMS paid its shareholders’ dividend for the last time. As of then, Zwolsman’s imperium went downhill. A letter from Leo Verboon to Yayoi Kusama (which must, presumably, have been sent to artists around the world in some variation) explained all the reasons for the cancellation, adding the fact that some projects were extremely costly to set up, and would require a disproportional part of the budget. In April 1966, the plans for “Zero on Sea” were exhibited at Orez. The following year, architecture magazine *Forum* published a selection of the designs. In 1970, the Amsterdam Art Historical Institute mounted an exhibition on the project, curated by Franck Gribling. The accompanying catalogue was, until now, the main guide to “Zero on Sea.”