

PRESS RELEASE

Ugo Rondinone
mountains

Art Basel Paris 2025

Preview, October 22 – 23

Public Days, October 24 – 26

Booth B37, Grand Palais, Paris

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present a solo booth by Ugo Rondinone with three new works from his *mountains* series. Each of these three-meter sculpture consists of large brightly painted stones stacked on concrete bases. The triple color sets provide the works with their identifying titles. All are from 2025.

People the world over have been stacking stones since Neolithic times. These piled rocks are humanity's primordial sculptures, as well as the genesis of stone architecture—Ancient Greek columns, for example, are made of stacked stones that were also brightly painted. The earliest and simplest antecedents of these works are called 'cairns' in both French and English. The word comes from Scottish Gaelic for "heaps or mounds of stones," but they have many other names, depending on the region—'Ovoo' in Mongolia, 'Seita' for the Sami, 'apacheta' in the Andes, 'kurgan' for Turkic peoples, etc. Various memorials, boundary markers, wayfinding 'milestones,' or indicators of significant locations, some are sacred and some merely practical. In every case, however, they are evidence of human presence. And, as such, remain a popular activity, notably with hikers.

Rondinone distantly evokes this enduring, primeval tradition in what is among his best-known series, thanks to his magnificent and widely publicized *Seven Magic Mountains* installation of 2016 on the edge of the Mojave Desert in Nevada. Collectively called 'mountains,' the free-standing works synthesize multiple references: cairns, megaliths, monuments, statues, tombs, reductivist sculpture, earthworks, colorful folk art, giant beads... But their bold and irresistible beauty does not rely on such references for their power. Instead, in the tradition of abstract art, the vivid sculptures directly address our innate capacity for sensation.

An unaccountable synthesis of nature and artifice, these simple but improbable constructions—how do they keep from falling? —are also enigmatic and physically intimidating. In keeping with contemporary art's typically open-ended approach to signification and its familiar ambiguity, these works both stimulate and frustrate our automatic 'reading' of them. Despite being rich with evocations that take us back to the very dawn of *homo faber*, Rondinone's *mountains* are, fundamentally, abstract instances of enchantment.

Looked at metaphorically, we might recognize ourselves in these striking constructions, or rather recognize modern humanity's nature-defying culture. Just as large rocks don't come in such bright colors, and certainly gravity won't permit them to stand on their own at their narrowest points, we were not meant by nature to fly, to conquer space and time, or to communicate instantly across continents. Beyond their direct and unmediated appeal to our senses, these witty but puzzling totems can be understood as reductive emblems of mankind, the vertical mammal.

Marc Mayer

In tandem with Galerie Eva Presenhuber's Rondinone presentation at the Grand Palais, the artist's monumental stone sculpture *the innocent* (2024) is on view in the forecourt of the Institut de France on the left bank end of the Pont des Arts.

GALERIE EVA PRESENHUBER

Ugo Rondinone is recognized as one of the major voices of his generation, an artist who composes searing meditations on nature and the human condition while establishing an organic formal vocabulary that fuses a variety of sculptural and painterly traditions. The breadth and generosity of his vision of human nature have resulted in a wide range of two-dimensional and three-dimensional objects, installations, videos, and performances. His hybridized forms, which borrow from ancient and modern cultural sources alike, exude pathos and humor, going straight to the heart of the most pressing issues of our time, where modernist achievement and archaic expression intersect.

Rondinone was born in 1964 in Brunnen, Switzerland. He studied at the University of Applied Arts in Vienna before moving to New York in 1997, where he lives and works to this day. His work has been the subject of recent institutional exhibitions at Pilane Heritage Museum, Pilane, SE (2025); Galleria d'Arte Moderna, Milan, IT (2025); Arte Abierto, Mexico City, MX (2025); Aspen Art Museum, Colorado, US (2024); Museum Würth 2 and Sculpture Garden, Künzelsau, DE (2024); Kunstmuseum Luzern, Lucerne, CH (2024); Museum SAN, Wonju, KR (2024); Städel Museum, Frankfurt, DE (2023); Storm King Art Center, New York, US (2023); Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, Geneva, CH (2023); Scuola Grande San Giovanni Evangelista di Venezia, Venice, IT (2022); Petit Palais, Paris, FR (2022); Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt, DE (2022); Tamayo Museum, Mexico City, MX (2022), and Belvedere, Vienna, AT (2021). In 2007 he represented Switzerland at the 52nd Venice Biennale.

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