The Book of Job belongs among the most important works of world literature. It addresses one of humanity’s chief existential problems – its idea of God and, in particular, theodicy, the justification of God’s omnipotence and goodness in a world marked by evil, by physical and moral ills. Human happiness and suffering often bear no apparent relation to individual conduct, to the way in which a person acts and thinks. Reflection on such issues automatically leads to the fundamental question as to what kind of life can appear ‘just’ (that is, justified) in the eyes of God. The possibility of justification was central to Luther’s religious thinking, so it is only logical that his German translation of the Book of Job should accompany the Hebrew text in Uecker’s book.
Uecker’s Book of Job meets the same kind of high theological demands. None of the forty-seven prints relates to the text in an illustrative way: none is a conventional narrative image. Instead, the prints consist of ur-forms and ur-structures. Nail shapes and traces of hands are occasionally recognisable, but otherwise the viewer is confronted with geometrical figures – dots, circles, a triangle, large rectangles and, time and again, a big disc like a powerful whirlwind – and with gestural marks, usually in black and white, but sometimes the colour of sand. The latter consists of real sand, imprinted on the surface using the terragraph technique invented by the Har-El printing studio. The sand is symbolic. It evokes the deserts of the Middle East, the environment inhabited by biblical narratives, the place where God revealed himself to Moses in the Burning Bush, the wilderness into which Jesus withdrew for forty days to fast and pray. In his Job cycle Uecker has devised compelling visual equivalents to the basic religious tenor of the text: God is someone who cannot, and may not, be imaged in human terms, who resides in primal shapes like a primal force (in the metaphorical, not the deist sense), who is revealed in those shapes and who confronts humanity as a focus of energy, as a circling whirlwind emerging from the weather (as the Book of Job poetically puts it), as a force field embodying his omnipotence.

Anyone familiar with Günther Uecker’s work knows that it reflects physical acts in an immediate way. In a sense, his works are a kind of ‘action art’. Physicality is perceptible in the Job prints as the vigorous, rhythmic motions involved in painting and shaping, as the expression of mental and emotional excitement, of an inner fire. In this way, the prints represent a dramatic staging of the Book of Job, a virtualised enactment of spoken address and responses, of the desperate laments of Job and the appearances of God. Uecker’s images give visible shape to the content of the biblical narrative, to this tale of the omnipotence and mystery of God, of humankind’s wrestling with its idea of God. In Uecker’s prints a book of the Bible becomes a living vision of God, not an image of God.