

Karel Appel*Paris / New York*

First Floor, 41 Dover Street, London W1S 4NS

20 January – 26 February 2022

Galerie Max Hetzler, London is pleased to announce Karel Appel's (1921–2006) solo exhibition, *Paris/New York*, which explores two tenets of the artist's practice that emerge out of his early years spent in the two cities: the nude figure and action painting. This exhibition traces Appel's exploration of the nude from the 1950s to the 2000s. In parallel, a monumental painting made for *documenta III* (1964) will be on view for the first time since, alongside other works from this period. This will be the first dedicated Appel exhibition in the UK in nearly four decades and the inaugural exhibition of our expanded gallery space at 41 Dover Street in London.

A founding figure of CoBrA (1948-1951), Karel Appel began his career in the aftermath of the Second World War. Over the course of six decades, the artist experimented widely. Distinguishing himself for his astonishing capacity to innovate, Appel never settled on a signature style, media or subject. Going beyond his classical, academic training at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, the artist looked at folk art, children's art and outsider art, whilst also drawing from jazz's spirit of improvisation. Alternating between abstraction and figuration, Appel adopted a material-oriented approach and promoted free expression.

"When Karel Appel moved to Paris in 1950, the city was still considered the international capital of the avant-garde, in spite of New York's competing claims. While living in Paris, Appel met international collectors, art dealers and curators, who would become instrumental in his breakthrough, but he was also one of the few Parisian artists to succeed early on in the art capital in the making. He had his first solo show at Martha Jackson Gallery in New York in 1954, and on the occasion of his second, in 1957, he crossed the Atlantic for the first time. From then on, he would divide his time between both sides.

While he would always remain rooted in Europe, the shift in perspective from an art world derived from history to the New World that was supposedly free of history's weight had a discernible impact on his work: it was the impetus for Appel's most abstract phase with paintings that could attain sizes approaching those of the New York School artists. Abstract painting in life sized formats could push an artist to a performance-like working manner, as shown in Hans Namuth's famous Jackson Pollock film of 1950. Eleven years later, and possibly inspired by this, the Dutch journalist and film maker Jan Vrijman realised a film showing Appel as an action painter. Appel's huge painting, *Untitled [documenta III, 1964]*, 1964 (270 x 680 cm) is a spectacular example of painting as action – spectacular not only in size but even more so due to the circumstances of its creation: the works that had been selected for *documenta III* were blocked by the customs authorities. When it became clear that they would not be released in time, Appel ordered four huge panels and enough paint, had the panels mounted on the empty wall in his space and created the painting during the night before the opening. The late curator, writer and publisher Johannes Gachnang described his confrontation with it at *documenta III* as a sort of revelation. He was of course impressed by the size which, as he wrote much later, exceeded even that of famous American Action Paintings, but also by its focussed realization and its expressive presence.



Karel Appel, *Bataille d'animaux*, 1958, oil on canvas, 114 x 146 cm.; 44 7/8 x 57 1/2 in.
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However, during Appel's early Paris/New York period, there appeared another theme in his work, and a rather surprising one: the nude. This arguably most academic theme might be considered as the very opposite of abstraction or action painting. It would seem likewise incompatible in comparison to Appel's earlier CoBrA work, which was largely inspired by children's drawings or drawings by mentally ill outsiders, precisely in order to ridicule academicism. True, Appel had drawn nudes during his study at the academy, and there is one isolated nude of 1953 painted in a somewhat CoBrA like manner, but only from 1957 onwards would it emerge as an important and recurring theme, and one may assume that this was triggered by his encounter with his American fellow Dutchman Willem de Kooning, the only painter of the New York School, who consistently worked between abstraction and figuration – like Karel Appel – and who was famous for his female nudes.”

- Franz W. Kaiser, CEO Karel Appel Foundation

The exhibition will be accompanied by a joint-publication for Karel Appel: Paris/New York, Galerie Max Hetzler, London (2022); Karel Appel: Object Paintings, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin (2021) and Karel Appel: Late Nudes, 1985 – 1995, Galerie Max Hetzler, Berlin (2020).

Karel Appel (1921-2006) lived and worked in Paris and New York, among other places. Retrospective exhibitions of the artist's work have been held at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in 2017 and the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague in 2016. Further solo exhibitions have been held at important institutions worldwide, such as Emil Schumacher Museum Hagen; Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.; Staatliche Graphische Sammlung, Munich (all 2016); Musée National d'Art Moderne – Centre Pompidou, Paris (2015); Museum Jorn, Silkeborg (2013); Cobra Museum, Amstelveen (2008); Albertina, Vienna (2007); Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague (2005); National Museum, Belgrade; Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (both 2004); Kunstforum Wien, Vienna (2002); Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (2001); Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent (2000), among others. Appel's work has been included in group exhibitions at the Schirn Kunsthalle, Frankfurt am Main; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Museo de Bellas Artes de Bilbao, Bilbao; and Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels (all 2018); Haus der Kunst, Munich (2016); Kunstmuseum Stuttgart, Stuttgart (2015); Tate St Ives, St Ives (2014); Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam (both 2013); The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (2012); Bridgestone Museum of Art, Tokyo; Ishibashi Foundation, Tokyo (both 2011); Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg (2003); The Royal Academy of Arts, London (2002); Tate Gallery Liverpool, Liverpool (2000), among others.

Karel Appel's work is represented in institutional collections worldwide including Tate, London; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, Paris; Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, Amsterdam; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; The Phillips Collection, Washington D.C.; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Albertina, Vienna; Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Museu de Arte de São Paulo, São Paulo; Museo de Arte Moderno, Mexico City; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; National Museum of Art, Osaka; and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, among many others.

We would like to thank the Karel Appel Foundation for their generous support.

Current and upcoming exhibitions:

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Matthew Barney

After Ruby Ridge

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623 Berlin

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Goethestraße 2/3, 10623 Berlin

6 November 2021 – 29 January 2022

André Butzer

Rohe Milch

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785 Berlin

15 December 2021 – 29 January 2022

Inge Mahn

*Adventskranz mit balancierenden Stühlen,
2020*

Goethestraße 2/3, 10623 Berlin

7 January – 26 February 2022

Robert Grosvenor

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14 January – 26 February 2022

Giulia Andreani

Kitchen Knife

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623 Berlin

11 February – 16 April 2022

Hans Josephsohn

Goethestraße 2/3, 10623 Berlin

12 February – 16 April 2022

Ida Ekblad

Potsdamerstraße 77-87, 10623 Berlin

Paris

15 January – 26 February 2022

David Novros

57, rue du Temple, 75004 Paris

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March – April 2022

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