

Karel Appel

CoBrA | Non-CoBrA

First Floor, 41 Dover Street, London W1S 4NS

11 January – 17 February 2024

Opening: Thursday, 11 January, 6 – 8 pm

Galerie Max Hetzler, London is pleased to present *CoBrA | Non-CoBrA*, a solo exhibition of works by **Karel Appel** (1921–2006). This is the artist's fifth solo presentation with the gallery, and the second in the London space.

On 8 November 1948, two Belgian poets, alongside one Danish and three Dutch painters, gathered in the Café de l'Hôtel Notre-Dame in Paris. Here, they founded an avant-garde movement that soon would be given the name CoBrA, a compilation of the initials of Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam, the capital cities from which the founders originated. While Paris was still considered the world's art capital, 'Pa' was conspicuously absent from the name.

Last year, several institutional exhibitions commemorated the 75th birthday of CoBrA's inception, which might be taken as a proof of the movement's lasting impact. However, just three years after its foundation, CoBrA was disbanded and virtually forgotten for the rest of the 1950s. Its rediscovery began in the 1960s, encouraged by its key figure, the Belgian poet Christian Dotremont, as well as by some galleries and collectors who specialised in the movement. The name's labelling efficiency may have played a role in this astonishing success.

Karel Appel, born in Amsterdam, was one of the six CoBrA founders. Yet, he was the only one to succeed in his international breakthrough quite soon after the group's dissolution. In 1954, he had his first exhibition in New York, the upcoming new art capital, and from 1957 onwards, he shared his time between Paris and New York. Then, he was perceived as an artist of the Nouvelle École de Paris, rather than a member of CoBrA.

By the time the world's art capital had shifted from Paris to New York, around the mid-1960s, the medium of painting had become considered outdated. Appel, always in search of new inspiration during his long career, reacted by incorporating elements of the sleek Pop style with typical CoBrA themes, which he had all but abandoned in the interim. This combination was very successful and, despite lasting no longer than a decade, it crystallised his exclusive association with CoBrA in the general perception.

In the midst of 2023, the CoBrA anniversary year, Galerie Max Hetzler published a catalogue compiling the four Karel Appel exhibitions that the



Karel Appel, *Little Cobra Painting*, 1948



Karel Appel, *Red House*, 1981
Photos: Jack Hems

gallery has shown so far in its London and Berlin spaces, yet the artist's CoBrA work was deliberately left out from this publication. There is much more to tell about a practice spanning over 6 decades than simply the three years of Appel's involvement with CoBrA. A common aim of the four exhibitions, each of which proposed a different approach, was to counter the notorious tendency to reduce his oeuvre to the CoBrA years.

The present exhibition sets out to diversify this reductionist image. In a rather didactical setup, it separates the CoBrA years from Appel's subsequent production. In the street facing galleries, the first room is dedicated to works from just before and just after CoBrA, marking the borders as it were. The selection in the connecting two rooms has been made in view of offering a brief *apreçu* of the diversity of themes and styles from before and after the transitory death of painting. In gallery two, works from the original CoBrA period are juxtaposed with examples of the re-emergence of its themes in a Pop-inspired style. Exploring both the early influences as a member of an avant-garde group and the later thematic and stylistic shifts within Appel's extensive body of work, *CoBrA | Non-CoBrA* thus considers the enduring legacy of an artist who tirelessly straddled continents, styles and mediums.

Franz W. Kaiser

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 Paris (2017); and Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague (2016). Further solo exhibitions include the Emil Schumacher Museum Hagen; The Phillips Collection, Washington, D.C.; Staatliche Graphische Sammlungen, Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich (all 2016); 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); and Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent (2000), among others.

Appel's work is in the collections of the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; LACMA, Los Angeles; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris; MoMA, New York; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Tate, London, among others.

Further exhibitions and events

Berlin:

3 November 2023 – 10 February 2024

Richard Prince

Body

Potsdamer Straße 77-87, 10785

19 January – 24 February 2024

Günther Förg

Häuser und Fenster

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623

19 January – 2 March 2024

Jake Longstreth

Springtime at the Scottsdale, Arizona Walmart

Bleibtreustraße 15/16, 10623

19 January – 2 March 2024

Jake Longstreth

American Heat

Goethestraße 2/3, 10623

Paris:

13 January – 17 February 2024

Grace Weaver

Hotel Paintings

46 & 57, rue du Temple, 75004

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