

Karel Appel *The Classic Themes*

1 March – 12 April 2025

Bleibtreustraße 45, 10623 Berlin

Opening: Saturday, 1 March, 6 – 8pm



Karel Appel, *Nude (Nude Series)*, 1962

Galerie Max Hetzler is pleased to present *The Classic Themes*, an exhibition of paintings and works on paper by **Karel Appel** at Bleibtreustraße 45 in Berlin. Building on the artist's important retrospective at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag (today Kunstmuseum Den Haag) in 2016, *The Classic Themes* marks the sixth exhibition of Karel Appel at the gallery.

'The major Karel Appel retrospective at the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag in 2016 – ten years following the artist's death – was set to radically renew the traditional view of Appel's extensive oeuvre. Within its thematic structure, only one of the six large halls was dedicated to the CoBrA movement, while three of the others focused on very classical themes – nude, landscape or portrait. The prominence given to these classical themes flagrantly contradicted CoBrA's primitivism. In addition, it was shown for the first time that Appel did not always paint 'spontaneously', but very often started from drawings, selected from the graphic diversity of his constantly active, visual thought process. This, too, shed a new light on Appel's traditional image, which is usually associated with the intuitive improvisation that set the tone for the avant-gardes of the fifties and sixties: the CoBrA Group, the Nouvelle École de Paris and Abstract Expressionism.

The exhibition at Galerie Max Hetzler concentrates on these three classic themes and, where preliminary drawings can be linked to the paintings on display, they are presented alongside them. The Classic Themes thus offers new insights into Karel Appel's working method, inviting a reassessment of established stereotypes. Due to the show's thematic and therefore non-chronological structure, works from different stylistic phases are exhibited side by side.

The exhibition begins with a very early 'portrait' from 1946. Its style appears related to what the French critic Michel Ragon would later call 'post-cubism'. Appel and his friend Corneille had come across a publication that had appeared for an exhibition at the Galerie de France featuring five 'post-cubist' painters. The plan to visit one of them – namely Édouard Pignon, a close friend of Picasso – triggered the two young artists' first trip to Paris in 1947.

The show's initial two rooms are also dedicated to the portrait theme. The first brings together portraits of poets with whom Appel had lifelong friendships, including two Belgians, Emmanuel Looten (1908–1974) and Hugo Claus (1929–2008), as well as the best-known representative of the American 'Beat

Generation', Allen Ginsberg (1926–1997). The second room shows portraits of two women with whom Appel was crucially connected during the most striking early phases of his career: Tonie Sluyter (1929–2012), Appel's partner during the CoBrA years, and Machteld van der Groen (1935–1970), his companion over the first ten years of his international fame.

The third room combines nudes from three different phases of his work: the beginning of the sixties, the mid-nineties, and the year 2000. The last room presents landscapes, again from different phases: a relief whose style is reminiscent of Pop Art; a four-and-a-half-metre-wide triptych from the eighties, when Appel took up the landscape theme quite decidedly as a panorama; and two pictures from the late nineties, one of which seems to have been painted spontaneously, while the preliminary drawing for the other gives insight into Appel's process of developing templates for monumental paintings from found pictures.'

Franz Kaiser, 2025

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 (today Kunstmuseum Den Haag) (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 (today Kunstmuseum Den Haag) (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 Albertina, Vienna; Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto; Astrup Fearnley Museet, Oslo; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Gemeentemuseum Den Haag, The Hague (today Kunstmuseum Den Haag); Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C.; LACMA, Los Angeles; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris; Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid; The Museum of Modern Art, New York; Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam; Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam; and Tate, London, among many others.

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10785 Berlin

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10623 Berlin

Stories Of Your Lives
1 March – 12 April 2025
Goethestraße 2/3
10623 Berlin

PARIS

André Butzer
Frau am Tisch mit Früchten
1 March – 5 April 2025
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75004 Paris

LONDON

Carroll Dunham
Open Studio & Empty Spaces
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41 Dover Street
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