

Karel Appel, L'Homme fibou n°1, 1960, acrylique sur sautoie d'olivier, 157 x 90 x 52 cm, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris, Photo: Fondation Karel Appel © Karel Appel Foundation / ADAGP, Paris 2017



KAREL APPEL

L'ART EST UNE FÊTE!

24 février – 20 août 2017

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#KarelAppel

BeauxArts
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PREMIÈRE

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Karel Appel Art as Celebration!

24 February – 20 August 2017

Press preview: 23 February 2017 11 am – 2 pm

Opening: 23 February 6 – 9 pm

Taking as its starting point a remarkable group of twenty-one paintings and sculptures donated by the Karel Appel Foundation in Amsterdam, the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris is presenting an exhibition covering the artist's entire career, from the CoBrA years to his death in 2006.

The cosmopolitan Dutch artist Karel Appel is known as one of the founding members of the **CoBrA** group, created in Paris in 1948 and self-dissolved in 1951. With members including Asger Jorn and Pierre Alechinsky, CoBrA set out to eclipse such contemporary academic forms as abstract art, which they saw as too rigid and rational. They proposed instead a **spontaneous, experimental** art that included various practices inspired by **Primitivism**. They were especially drawn to children's drawings and the art of the mentally disturbed, and held fast to the international aspirations characteristic of the avant-garde.

Contemporary with Jean Dubuffet's Art Brut et Compagnie, also founded in 1948, CoBrA was part of the same **counter-culture**, rejecting established values, calling for a fresh start freed of convention, and espousing the spontaneity of naive art.

Something of a nomad, Appel lived in a number of different countries. In 1950 he moved to France, where his work was actively backed by critics like Michel Ragon and **Michel Tapié**, who saw in his work the European equivalent of the Abstract Expressionist movement that had sprung up around Jackson Pollock.

Appel went on to work in a complex **gestural** vein. After a transitional period in the 1970s during which he moved back towards abstraction, the 1980s saw a return to the more painterly approach of the **large polyptychs** that are a high point of the show. The sculptures dotted through the exhibition include CoBrA bricolages and enormous baroque installations whose **playfulness** echoes the vitalism of the painted oeuvre.

The exhibition will include a large group of landmark works, among them the **Carnet d'art psychopathologique** and paintings and ceramic sculptures from the 1950s. The visitor then moves on to big installations from the 1970s and 1990s, and the exhibition closes with a little-known **artistic testament** painted just before Appel's death in 2006.



The Owlman no. 1, 1960,
acrylic on olive tree trunk
Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris
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Museum Director

Fabrice Hergott

Exhibition curator

Choghakate Kazarian

Visitor information

Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris

11 Avenue du Président Wilson

75116 Paris

Tel. 01 53 67 40 00

www.mam.paris.fr

Open Tuesday – Sunday

10 am – 6 pm

Late closing: Thursday 10 pm

Catalogue published by Paris

Musées 44,90 €

Admission

Full rate: 10 €

Concessions: 7 €

Cultural activities

Information and bookings

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#KarelAppel

Biography of the artist

1921

Birth of Christiaan Karel Appel in Amsterdam on April 25. His father has a barber's shop in a working-class neighbourhood.

Années 1930

He begins painting with his uncle Karel Chevalier, an amateur artist.

1942

At his second attempt he is admitted to the Rijksakademie, the Royal Academy of Visual Arts, where he meets the painter Corneille.

1946

First solo exhibition at Het Beerenhuis, in Groningen. He also shows with Constant, Eugène Brands and Anton Rooskens in the "Jonge Schilders" (Young Painters) exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, where he sees the "Picasso/Matisse" exhibition.

1947

In the autumn Appel and Corneille travel to Paris for the first time and visit Edouard Pignon. At the René Drouin gallery Appel is struck by the work of Jean Dubuffet. He makes reliefs and sculptures using found objects.

1948

Appel sees the exhibition "Paul Klee" at the Stedelijk Museum, where he is showing with Corneille and Jan Nieuwenhuys. The museum acquires his *Matrozenmeisje* (Sailor's Girl, 1946). On July 16 Constant delivers a highly political artistic manifesto at a meeting at which Appel, Corneille, Nieuwenhuys, Rooskens and Theo Wolvekamp are present. This results in the founding of the Experimentele Groep in Holland and the magazine *Reflex*. In November the group goes to Paris for a lecture organised by the Revolutionary Surrealists. Taking issue with the French faction, Christian Dotremont, Asger Jorn, Appel, Constant, Corneille and Joseph Noiret walk out and meet up at the café Notre Dame; there, on November 8, they found the group that will become known as CoBrA.

1949

Appel and Corneille go back to Paris, where Jacques Doucet organises an exhibition of their work at the Colette Allendy gallery. Appel meets Michel Ragon, the art critic who will champion CoBrA. Appel is commissioned to paint a mural for the cafeteria in Amsterdam's City Hall, but after heated controversy the work is papered over.

1950

Appel moves to Paris in September and settles in Rue Santeuil.

1951

The Amsterdam Municipal Council commissions another mural, this time for the lobby of the Stedelijk Museum auditorium. The work has since become known as *Appel Bar*.

In February Michel Ragon curates two CoBrA exhibitions in Paris. After a final show at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Liège the group is dissolved.

1953

First major solo show at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. James Johnson Sweeney, director of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, visits Appel's studio, buys two paintings and features him in the "Young European Painters" exhibition at the Guggenheim that same year.

1954

Appel represents the Netherlands at the 27th Venice Biennale, where he receives the UNESCO Award for the Promotion of the Arts.

The Martha Jackson Gallery in New York presents his first American solo exhibition.

1957

On his first trip to New York Appel meets Abstract Expressionist painters and jazz personalities Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, Count Basie and Sarah Vaughan, whose portraits he paints. From now on he divides his time between Europe and the United States.

1959

Appel wins the International Painting Prize at the São Paulo biennial and takes part in "documenta 2" in Kassel.

1960

He receives the Guggenheim International Award.

1964

He takes part in "documenta 3" in Kassel, painting an enormous polyptych on the spot when his chosen picture fails to arrive on time. He buys and renovates the Château de Molesmes, near Auxerre in Burgundy.

1965-1966

First retrospective, at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. The exhibition travels in Europe.

1969-1970

Death of the artist's mother and his American dealer Martha Jackson, then of his companion Machteld.

1971-1974

Appel travels in South America, Mexico, Japan, Indonesia, India and Nepal.

1976

In Amsterdam he meets Harriet de Visser, who will become his lifelong partner.

1982

The Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris devotes an exhibition to CoBrA.

1983

Appel buys a new studio on 18th Street in New York, where he can paint very big canvases.

1984

Retrospective at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels. He begins a series of monumental nudes on paper.

1987

Designs the scenography for the ballet *Can We Dance a Landscape?* at the Opéra-Comique in Paris.

1988

Buys the Villa Licia at Mercatale, in Tuscany.

1989

Has a house built on land he has bought in Connecticut.

1990

Rudi Fuchs, director of the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague, curates a retrospective there, which later travels to Germany, Spain and Austria.

1992

After forty-two years Appel's *Psychopathological Notebook* is shown for the first time, in the exhibition "Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art" at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

2001

Exhibitions are organised in the Netherlands to celebrate Appel's eightieth birthday.

2003

France makes him an Officer of the Legion of Honour.
He moves to Zurich for health reasons.

2005

A heart operation in Switzerland is followed by a period of physical re-education.

2006

Karel Appel dies in Zurich on May 3. He is buried in Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

Exhibition Layout

Karel Appel (1921–2006)

To celebrate a remarkable donation of twenty-one paintings and sculptures by the Karel Appel Foundation, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris is dedicating an exhibition to the career of this Dutch artist who lived in the French capital from 1950 to 1977.

Born in Amsterdam, Appel took part in 1948 in the founding of the Experimentele Groep in Holland (Experimental Group in Holland), then of the CoBrA group; he would become one of the most famous of the CoBrA artists, along with the Dane Asger Jorn and his fellow Dutchman Constant. Moving to Paris in 1950 he soon dissociated himself from the other members' political leanings: advocating an art free of all ideology and "isms", he painted in an independent, colourfully profuse style centred on the human and the animal. This exhibition features major works from his sixty-year career. Shown side by side, the paintings and sculptures interact with or react against each other, highlighting the presence or absence of the painterly gesture in an oeuvre which, as the poet Hugo Claus put it, embodies "the splendour of life at its maximum frequency."

CoBrA (1948–1951)

During the winter of 1947–1948, Appel and Corneille met Constant who, on July 16, delivered a highly political artistic manifesto at a meeting at which Appel, Corneille, Nieuwenhuys, Rooskens and Wolvekamp were present. This resulted in the founding of the Experimentele Groep in Holland, followed in September by the first issue of the magazine *Reflex*, which contained Constant's manifesto.

Constant introduced Appel and Corneille to Christian Dotremont in Brussels, and in November 1948 all four went to Paris for an international conference on avant-garde art organised by the Revolutionary Surrealists. Taking issue with the French faction, Dotremont, Asger Jorn, Appel, Constant, Corneille and Noiret walked out and got together at the café Notre Dame where, on November 8, they founded the CoBrA group; the name refers to the capital cities of the members' different countries: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam.

While Appel contributed to CoBrA's exhibitions and publications, he did not share the political convictions of several of its members. Even so, his work is marked by the group's primitivist aesthetic: scribbles and bright colours, inelegant found objects brought together in improvised sculptures and non-Western totems. Rebelling against the academic turn taken by abstraction, CoBrA urged a spontaneous, experimental approach suggestive of children's drawing or vernacular art; in this they were harking back to the historical avant-garde's interest in the primitive.

Expressive vehemence (1952–1957)

Appel had moved to Paris in 1950 and stayed on after the CoBrA group was dissolved in 1951. While other members including Asger Jorn and Constant set up other groups with overtly political/utopian aspirations –the International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus in 1954, then the Situationist International in 1957– Appel opted for a more solitary, more Parisian path. He soon caught the eye of Michel Tapié, who introduced him into French and European art circles. Tapié was fascinated by the expressive vehemence of Appel's painting, and included him in both the exhibition and the book titled *Un art autre* (Art of Another Kind), a variation on "Informal Art" that he applied to an action-inflected painting that had sprung up, since the late 1940s, on both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere: Abstract Expressionism in America, Lyrical Abstraction in Europe and Gutai in Japan. Lavish and straight from the tube, Appel's painting at the time was marked by the same expressive gestuality as his sculpture. Temporarily abandoning his CoBrA-style bricolages, he took up ceramics and clay

modelling. Tapié introduced him to the New York gallerist Martha Jackson, and from 1957 onwards he divided his time between Paris and New York.

De werkelijkheid van Karel Appel (The Reality of Karel Appel), 1961, six-minute excerpt.

In 1961, the filmmaker and journalist Jan Vrijman asked Appel if he could film him painting –or, more exactly, actually creating a work on camera. Initially dubious, Appel finally consented and for filming purposes a space in Groeneveld Castle in the Netherlands was set up in place of his Paris studio, with black walls cutting the artist and his creative process off from the rest of the world.

In the film we see him painting *Archaic Life*, which can be seen in the next room. Against a background of “barbarian music” composed by Appel himself and jazzman Dizzy Gillespie, he throws himself at the canvas, grappling with it in a way that emphasises the improvisation and speed of execution that were recurring aspects of the Abstract Expressionism and Lyrical Abstraction of the 1950s. What we see here is the sheer vehemence of a style born out of opposition to the rationality and structure of geometrical abstraction.

Classicism and tempered vehemence (1959–1969)

In the wake of his first stay in New York in 1957 his pictures, already sizable, became even bigger. In the early 1960s he was still displaying the lavish gesturality of the preceding decade, but it had reached its peak. Moving away somewhat from the animal and childlike subjects of the CoBrA period, he began exploring the nude and archaic landscapes depicted in a near-abstract style. He spent the summers of 1960 and 1961 in Nice, at the home of Jean Larcade, owner of the Rive Droite gallery that was representing him. The outcome was one of his most significant sculpture series, using materials found on site: he dug up burnt olive tree stumps and painted their twists and turns to produce vividly coloured creatures that were half man, half animal. Trying out the plastic products then in vogue, he also made a series of paintings in which a Pop Art face was overlaid with artificial flowers. This method foreshadowed his late work, with its combining of objects and paint on canvas.

In-between (1969–1980)

The late 1960s saw Appel give up gestural painting in favour of fresh, less overtly expressive experiments: painted reliefs with sharper contours, plastic sculptures, or more colourful reinterpretations of his vocabulary. In the sculptures, which he was also producing for public spaces, he was using large, flat areas of even brighter colours for reliefs in a Pop vein midway between painting and sculpture.

Late in the decade, between 1977 and 1980, he came up with a series that was a watershed in his career and a new starting point. In a radical shift he turned away from his colourful figuration to a more relaxed kind of gestural painting and a re-learning of the painterly gesture. Abandoning his manual dexterity and straight-from-the-tube approach, he brought flat brushes and greater deliberation and structure to subjects in the Dutch tradition –trees, windmills and so on– rendered in an almost abstract way.

The 1980s

For Appel the early 1980s were a time of painterly renewal. Back in New York after travelling widely, he created a group of monumental polyptychs. Full of giants and drama –diluvian disaster, decapitations– these works are in a more narrative gestural vein.

Even if Appel is from an earlier generation, his works echoed the regeneration of figurative painting exemplified by the Neue Wilden in Germany, the Transavanguardia in Italy, Figuration Libre in France and *Bad Painting* in America. In retrospect Appel can be seen as the fountainhead of this eclectic Neo-Expressionism. As the decade drew to a close he undertook a fresh stylistic exercise that heralded his final phase, replacing his characteristically lively colour work with pared-down

compositions in black and white. Here he was testing out the human figure and its relationship with a space whose vast emptiness resonates with the anguish of man in the universe.

Feestje? The late work (1990–2006)

Appel was now working mainly in three studios: Darien in Connecticut, New York and Mercatale in Tuscany. In search of materials for new sculptures, in Italy he happened on carnival accessories which he incorporated into large-scale sculpture-assemblages. In his enormous studio he produced monumental installations inspired by the worlds of theatre and the carnival: among them was *Singing Donkeys*, whose papier mâché heads welcome visitors to this exhibition. In a further return to his animal vocabulary he put together oversized toys whose association with each other generates an effect tinged with melancholy. In contrast with these baroque sculptural effusions, his painting from this period is reduced to stark representations of the human body.

Practical information

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Station Vélib' : 3 av. Montaigne or 2 rue Marceau
Station Autolib' : 24 av. d'Iéna, 33 av. Pierre 1^{er} de Serbie or 1 av. Marceau

Opening hours

Tuesday to Sunday from 10am to 6pm (ticket desk closes at 5:15pm)
Late opening on Thursdays until 10pm only for special exhibitions (ticket desk closes at 9:15pm)
Closed on Mondays and during bank holidays

Admission

Combined ticket Karel Appel / Medusa

Full rate €15
Concessions €11

Combined ticket Karel Appel / Derain, Balthus, Giacometti

Full rate €15
Concessions €11

Ticket desk

No-queue tickets available on www.mam.paris.fr

The museum also presents

EVA & ADELE in the collection from september 30th 2016 to february 26th 2017

Upcoming exhibitions

Medusa, Bijoux et Tabous (19 may - 5 november 2017)
Derain, Balthus, Giacometti (2 june - 29 october 2017)

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