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HUMAN ANIMALS THE ART OF COBRA

COBRA CONTEMPORARY LEGACY

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University Museum of Contemporary Art

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THE COBRA MOVEMENT

Cobra was formed in Paris in 1948 as an international avant-garde movement that united artists and poets of three cities —Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam—by Christian Dotremont (Belgian, 1922–1979), Joseph Noiret (Belgian, 1927–2012), Asger Jorn (Danish, 1914–1973), Karel Appel (Dutch, 1921–2006), Constant (Dutch, 1920–2005), and Corneille (Dutch, 1922–2010). The Cobra artists were inspired by the idea of the "human animal," a playful or perhaps satirical representation of people's animalistic instincts and desires, while evoking the symbolic relationship between humans, animals, and the natural environment. The group chose the snake as a totem because of the animal's universal presence as a mythic and religious symbol. Cobra believed that all humans have the potential to be creative. They prioritized spontaneity, experimentation, and collaboration in their artistic production and rejected realism, naturalism, and specialization in any one medium. In the first volume of the Dutch avant-garde journal *Reflex* in 1948, Constant published an important Cobra manifesto. The manifesto reflects the group's Marxist ideas, their break from Surrealism and other Western art movements, and their attempt to break down the distinction between art and life. Constant defines art-making in a radically new way. He writes: "A painting is not a composition of color and line but an animal, a night, a scream, a human being, or all of these things together."

Through the ten issues of the journal *Cobra*, Cobra artists and writers communicated their ideas and theorized the major themes of their movement to an international readership. Cobra organized two major exhibitions in 1949 and 1951, each titled "International Exhibition of Cobra Experimental Art." The first exhibition, held at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, demonstrated the group's freedom of artistic expression and experimentation in contemporary viewing practices. The show provoked more outrage than praise, and a riot even broke out during a reading by Christian Dotremont of his own Cobra manifesto. The 1951 show at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Liège, the "Gothic," "Latin," and "Nordic" tendencies in European culture in his writings of the 1960s.

The old Michelin slogan *Nunc est bibendum* (Now is the time to drink) comes from Horace's *Odes*. Iron casts of the sculptural Michelin Man were once used at gas stations as compressed air pumps to fill car tires. The gesture of one hand at the figure's mouth is therefore a double one: it both held the valve for the tire pump tube and in early advertisements it held a cigar – another reference to Cuban culture. Heil has replaced the original "MICHELIN" text on the belly of the Bibendum to "CHE!" This recalls Che Guevara's famous paraphrase of a line by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, which the Cobra artists posted in French on the Poet's Cage: "Let's be realistic and attempt the impossible (*Seamos realistas y hagamos lo imposible*)." The original Cobra placard hung on the Poet's Cage in 1949 quoted Lenin as follows:

> We must dream, but on the condition that we believe seriously in our dream, that we reexamine carefully the reality of life, that we confront our observations with our dream, that we realize scrupulously our fantasy.
>
> Il faut rêver, mais à la condition de croire sérieusement en notre rêve, d'examiner attentivement la vie réelle, de confronter nos observations avec notre rêve, de réaliser scrupuleusement notre fantaisie.

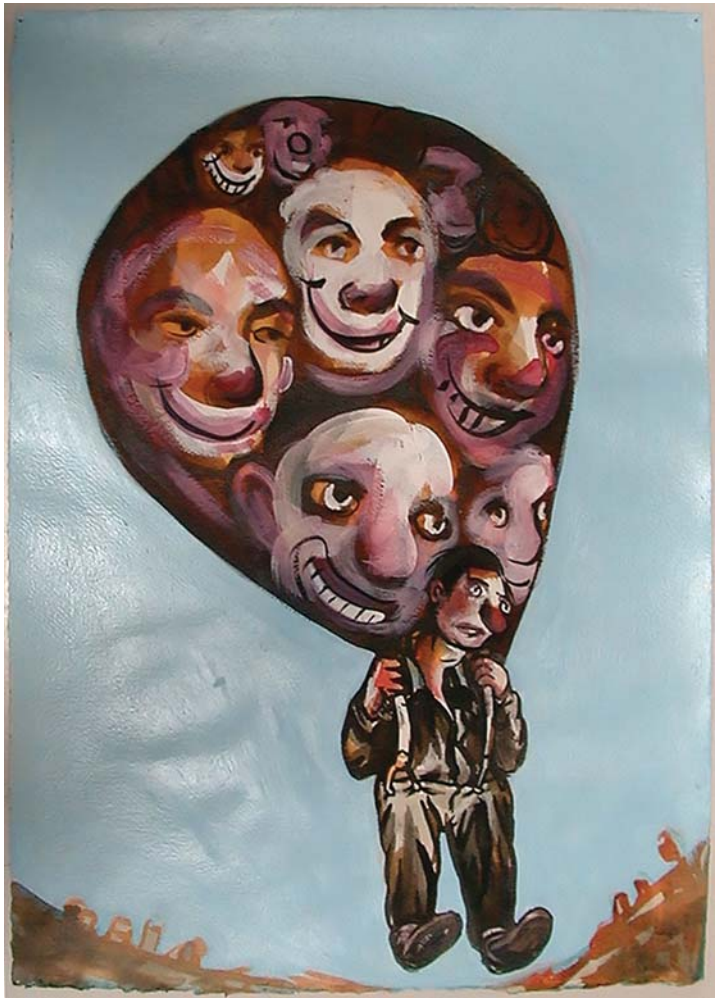
Axel Heil (German, b. 1965)
Cultural Congress of Havana: Reunion of Intellectuals from Around the World on Problems of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Congreso Cultural de La Habana: Reunión de intelectuales de todo el mundo sobre problemas de Asia, Africa y América Latina), 2007-10
Bronze cast from found objects, body board, and live cactus
Height 63 cm
Courtesy the artist and Van de Loo Projekte, Munich

Cultural Congress of Havana... refers to the international congress of the same name that Asger Jorn attended in Cuba in 1968, along with artists from all over the world, including his friend, Cuban artist Wilfredo Lam. The Congress was intended to promote art's ability to free people from narrow and rigid ways of thinking and recognize its potential to ameliorate social injustices. A complex web of references links the cast found objects to the Congress and its aims to unite intellectuals from around the world to solve pressing problems overlooked by European and North American politicians. The Michelin tire company's famous Bibendum or Michelin Man – a European trademark introduced in 1894 in France – sits on two pigs, cast from found architectural objects made in Asia, one of which wears an African mask on its face. On the Michelin Man's head is a cactus, an old symbol of Mexico and Latin America. The playfully reductive symbolism of these three global regions under discussion in the Havana Congress echoes Jorn's idiosyncratic descriptions of

Belgium, included twice as many works as the first and displayed a more mature and sophisticated side of Cobra. The show included several well-known artists like Alberto Giacometti, Joan Miró and Wifredo Lam, and thus demonstrated Cobra's acceptance into the wider artistic community. Despite this, the show's unfavorable reviews and the onset of tuberculosis in Jorn and Dotremont forced the group to split up and cease to exist as a coherent, international network.

In the 1950s, artists all around Europe searched for ways to confront the traumatic history and legacy of the Second World War. Artists focused internationally on new forms of expressive abstraction in paint as well as other materials. Interest was revived in movements like German Expressionism, formerly considered "degenerate" under Fascism. Historical Expressionism and Surrealism were the major inspirations for Cobra. Abstract Expressionism in the United States was a parallel contemporary movement, but Cobra artists differed from the New York School in their ideas on art and politics. While the more well-known Abstract Expressionists, like Jackson Pollock, turned to pure abstraction as a more subtle response to the political propaganda of the war, Cobra took up popular imagery, including representations of animals by children and folk artists. They believed this imagery was more universal and liberating than high-culture abstraction. The Cobra artists did not merely represent popular imagery, but also attempted to intervene in society through their exhibitions and public artistic collaborations, as a rejection of the individualism of the existing art world. Although Cobra officially ended in 1951, the group's championing of spontaneity, experimentation, and collaboration lives on in the post-Cobra works of these artists. Many of them, including Pierre Alechinsky (b. 1927), Appel, and Jorn, developed the mature large-scale work for which they became famous in the decades afterwards. Their work directly impacts on the contemporary artists featured in "The Legacy of Cobra," including Herbert Gentry (American, 1919–2003), Jacqueline de Jong (Dutch, b. 1939), Albert Oehlen (German, b. 1954), Tal R (Danish, b. 1967 in Tel Aviv), and Nicole Eisenman (American, b. 1965 in Verdun, France).

Group photograph of the future Cobra artists on the occasion of the Høst exhibition in Copenhagen, N
Front row, on the floor, from left: Asger Jorn, Corneille, Constant and Henry Heerup with his flute. / Se
Mancoba, Else Alfelt. / Third row: Sixten Wiklund, Ernest Mancoba, Carl-Henning Pedersen, Erik Ortv
photo by Carl-Henning Pedersen. / Carl-Henning Pedersen and Else Alfelt Museum, Herning, Denmar



Nicole Eisenman (American, b. 1965)
Untitled (*Balloon Heads*)
Acrylic and ink on paper; 1998
21.25 x 15.25 inches (54 x 39.4 cm)
Collection Richard Gerrig and Timothy Peterson,
Stony Brook, New York

Nicole Eisenman examines the contemporary world through characters real and imagined. Recalling the Cobra artists' response to profound social and cultural changes in postwar Europe, Eisenman's figural paintings foreground the interconnectedness of contemporary experience and social identity. Her work combines depictions of everyday activities and primal bodily experiences with specific references to art-history, political cartoons, and popular culture. Imbuing her figures with a psychological complexity, she obscures the symbolic associations of the human figure inherited from traditional heroic imagery and instead suggests a raw, emotional and explicitly fallible humanity. Faces are of particular interest to Eisenman. Her biting critiques of traditional masculine representations in particular confront outdated gender tropes associated with specific compositions, stories, or myths. Eisenman's playful approach to serious themes echoes the Cobra artists' desire to connect art and ordinary human experience—whether emotional and private or collective and political—by means of seemingly anachronistic popular symbols.

November-December 1948.
cond row: Karel Appel and Tonie Sluyter, Christian Dotremont, Sonja Ferlov-Mancoba holding Wonga
ad, Ejler Bille, Knud Nielsen, Tage Mellerup, Aage Vogel-Jørgensen and Erik Thommesen. Drawing on
k.

Albert Oehlen (German, b. 1954)
Test Animal (Ein Versuchstier), 1998
Oil on canvas
109 x 77.5 inches (276.9 x 196.9 cm)
Courtesy of the artist

Since the late 1970s, Albert Oehlen's wide-ranging explorations of "bad painting" in relation to the excesses and eccentricities of mass culture have rejected the contemporary revival of bombastic large-scale painting. The complexity of his more recent work, on the other hand, seems to reanimate painting's ambivalent heroics. His work responds directly to the written and artistic practices of Asger Jorn. In the 1980s, Oehlen discovered a German anthology of Jorn's writings published two decades earlier, *Thoughts of an Artist*, which despite its clichéed title presents Jorn's characteristically unpredictable and meandering, experimental approach to aesthetics. While first inspired by Jorn's written musings, by the 1990s Oehlen was appropriating elements of the Cobra artist's particular approach to humor and kitsch in painting. The title of this work refers to scientific laboratory tests on animals conducted by humans, often at the expense of non-human animals' lives and well-being. The reference to animal experiments reframes Cobra's emphasis on creative experimentation in a much more sinister light, suggesting a moral quandary that leaves the viewer hovering uncertainly between confrontation and sympathy or even identification with this half-formed creature. Framed by washes of blurred gray paint overlaid with sideways drips and spatters, perhaps a reference to the virtuosic painting of Karl-Otto Götz or his student Gerhard Richter—two quintessential "good" painters from 1960s Germany—and apatterned marks recalling children's finger painting, this test animal inhabits an ominous murky space. Removed from any recognizable setting, the creature subsists in some perverse institutional space. Oehlen's reinvention of figurative painting through appropriated photographic and advertising imagery, awkwardly flattened spaces, distortions, and tenuous gestures, defies triumphant declarations of contemporary prosperity. This work speaks directly to Jorn's approach to art as a parasitic social luxury that paradoxically embodies humanity's most profound aspirations.

Asger Jorn (Danish, 1914-1973)
Untitled, 1941
Oil on wood (Shrovetide barrel)
Height: 27.5 inches (69.9 cm)
NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale M-227

Jorn painted this one-of-a-kind barrel around the time he co-founded *Helhesten* (The Hell Horse), a Danish avant-garde journal and group active during the German occupation of Denmark (1940-1945). The group consisted of a network of interdisciplinary artists and writers committed to collective engagement through art, poetry, anthropology, and more. The group published twelve issues of their interdisciplinary journal, which served as a platform for artists, poets, and archaeologists to share their writing on critical theory and contemporary culture. In his Shrovetide barrel, Jorn depicts animalistic figures just discernible by their protruding eyes and curvilinear limbs. The figures blend into each other, making it impossible to tell where one begins and another ends. Ambiguity defines the figures. An arm or a pair of legs could just as easily be a beak or a claw, as exemplified by the green half almond-shaped forms attached to a red eye. Jorn's use of bright heterogeneous colors clearly differentiates one form from another, while the thick black outline emphasizes the form's cohesiveness. Jorn's colorful palette and creature-like forms recall children's art, while his rough brushstrokes and uneven application of paint add a level of complexity and, combined with the barrel as support, resist existing definitions of art. Jorn uses the utilitarian form of the barrel to relate to the shrovetide tradition of "cat in a barrel," a form of Carnival piñata, that dates back to the Middle Ages. Its designs reflect Jorn's study of international tendencies in surrealist painting, biomorphic abstraction, and painterly expression.

Christian Dotremont (Belgian, 1922-1979) (text) and Jean-Michel Atlan (French-Algerian, 1913-1960) (images)
Les transformes (*The Transforms*), original 1950, 1972
Artist's book, facsimile; edition 513/600
Overall dimensions: 9.9 x 7 inches (25.2 x 18 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection

This rare publication is one of the most important painter-poet collaborations from the "official" Cobra years (1948-51), first published as an edition by Pierre Alechinsky in 1972. The gouaches were made at the collective Ateliers du Marais in Brussels in 1950, and demonstrate the interaction between French-Algerian painter Jean-Michel Atlan and Belgian poet Christian Dotremont. They collaborated to create a spontaneous interpretation of the snakelike, mythical forms that inspired the Cobra artists in a play of handwritten text and image. The book's pages fold out accordion-style, giving it a particularly dynamic and physical presence. Readers are invited not just to hold the book while following with their eyes, but rather to stretch their arms in order to unfold it. Collaboration between poets and painters in the creation of imagery and text were not only an ordinary Cobra practice, but also a vital aspect of the movement. With such interactive elements, the book reiterates the collaborative nature of Cobra, inviting the reader to become part of the collaboration as well.

Tal R (Danish, b. Tel Aviv 1967)
SCHOLARS, 2012
Raku fired ceramic
27.5 x 22 x 11.875 inches (70 x 56 x 30 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and Cheim & Reid, New York

Abstracting and dematerializing animal forms in his "Scholars" series comprising Raku fired ceramics, Tal R creates biomorphic sculptures based on Chinese Scholar's Rocks. However, unlike traditional Scholar's Rocks, hollowed stones formed by natural forces revered for showcasing the dynamic transformational processes of nature, Tal R's ceramics acquire their vacant centers and undulating forms through a series of man-made practices, most notably the casting and burning away of the remains of a modern childhood icon – teddy bears. The artist links these discarded toys to the concept of "Kolbojnik" (leftovers), a term for the remains of collective meals that he encountered on a kibbutz in Israel. Tal R transforms comforting plush toys into strange contemplative forms that evoke the raw expression and experimentation of Cobra artists such as Asger Jorn, who skillfully mined the territory between "high" and "low" art.

Transcription |

La danse tord les membres de l'espace et du temps et les détend,
comme un rapace pour les embrasser.
Dans la bouche du blanc les dents, la langue et la gorge du pays interne,
l'agressivité du virage et la
souplesse de la dureté.
Si je me perds dans les bois / C'est pour gagner la forêt
Sur le désert blanc l'arbre des formes s'étend, et en même temps se
noue dans la sève noire de l'été du
dedans.

Translation |

Dance twists the limbs of space and time and soothes them like a
raptor in order to embrace them.
In the mouth of white, teeth, tongue, and throat of the internal country,
the aggressivity of bending and
the flexibility of hardness.
If I lose myself in the trees / It is to gain the forest
Over the white desert the tree of forms stretches, and at the same time
develops in the black sap of the
summer of the interior.

Translated by Karen Kurczynski

drawn to his club. Gentry eventually made his way to Copenhagen where he rented the studio of Danish Cobra painter Eijler Bille. He spent several years living and working in Scandinavia and Paris, settling in Malmö, Sweden while returning regularly to New York City. Gentry's incorporation of the abstract-surrealist visual language championed by Cobra, such as floating eyes and organic forms often inspired by masks, aided him in creating a living art he felt was tied to his own African heritage as well as the more contemporary and political insights of Cobra.

African-American painter Herbert Gentry traveled to Paris in 1947 as part of the first wave of GI Bill art students. The following year he opened Chez Honey, a jazz club and art gallery in Montparnasse, named for his wife at the time, a cabaret singer. The club became a creative hot spot for American expatriates and European jazz lovers. The improvisational nature of jazz inspired many abstract artists at the time, including Gentry himself. Gentry's belief in the social nature of art, represented through the expressive multi-figure imagery of his painted canvases, helped spark his dedicated interest in the Cobra art movement after meeting the Dutch Cobra members who were

Herbert Gentry (American, 1919-2000)
Arrival, 1999
Acrylic on canvas
32 x 44 inches (81.3 x 111.8 cm)
Courtesy of the Estate of Herbert Gentry

Eugène Brands (Dutch, 1913-2002)
Snake Mask, 1947
Papier maché and colored eggshell decorated with snakeskin
24.5 x 9 x 3.5 inches (61.6 x 22.9 x 8.9 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection; M-372
[not in exhibition]

This mask, one of only four surviving masks made and worn by the Dutch Cobra painter Eugène Brands, exemplifies the experimental spirit and playfulness of Cobra, yet it is not completely innocent of the colonial mode of thought. Taking the form of a face, the composition as a whole is somewhat abstracted by the unique addition of a cobra skin. Brands drew inspiration from the masks he collected from a dealer of West African and Oceanic art in Amsterdam. In addition to tribal art, he collected music from all over the world including West Africa, the Congo, Tibet, Iran, and Japan. His collection of music steadily grew to also include Indonesian gamelan, Chinese opera, jazz, blues, African-American spirituals and prison songs and European folk music from Flamenco to Romany music. His fascination with magic, cosmology, and healing power translated into works that combined exotic natural materials with the forms and ritualistic presence of tribal art. They may be criticized as an appropriation of African and Oceanic form and ritual, however his works also recall popular western traditions such as clowns and Carnival masks. These works take part in the long tradition of modern artists exploring non-western and popular art forms in order to reconnect art to human spirituality and social life. Contemporary photographs record Brands posing with the masks, suggesting that these objects were meant to be worn and performed, and not merely artwork hanging on a wall. This was as much a tribute to Dada as a cultural appropriation.

Karel Appel (Dutch, 1921-2006)
Birds on a Rooftop, 1953
Gouache on paper
19.5 x 25 inches (48.9 x 63.5 cm)
Collection of Smith College Museum of Art; Gift of Martha Jackson (Martha Kellogg, class of 1928) in memory of Louise Eastman (class of 1933)

Jacqueline de Jong (Dutch, b. 1939)
ohne Titel (War), 2013
Pastel and charcoal on paper
19.5 x 27.4 inches (49.5 x 69.5 cm)
Courtesy of the artist and the Weyland de Jong Foundation

One of the most well-known Cobra artists in the United States, Karel Appel, was deeply intrigued by the directness and spontaneity of children's art and the power of human drama. Early in his career, he was influenced by movements such as Amsterdam Impressionism and German Expressionism and artists such as Vincent Van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and Edouard Pignon. Around 1947, Appel began to develop his signature style with rough outlines, bold color schemes, and abstracted figures. Through aggressive gestures, he presents simple or popular imagery in vivid colors and textures that speak to humanity's inner drama. *Birds on a Rooftop* dates from

figures, perhaps an homage to Asger Jorn, her lover and confidant of ten years, and his concept of the human animal. As one of the first women to participate in the avant-garde Situationist International movement following WWII, and founder of *The Situationist Times* (1961-67), a radical journal devoted to the exploration of topology, de Jong is a key link between the Cobra and Situationist movements and their contemporary legacy. Her political and savage renderings of war present the lasting legacy and resonance of the Situationist message, critical of the spectacle of politics and infotainment that continue to numb audiences to the real human impact of wars around the globe.

In part a commemoration of World War I, Jacqueline de Jong's *War* series chronicles the artist's past and present understanding of war through the atmospheric and fragile medium of pastel. A survivor of World War II, and witness to humanity's violent acts through the present day, de Jong captures the terror and tenuousness of human existence in a world where humans are capable of total and utter destruction. In *ohne Titel (War)*, an animal-like face conjoins with a wide-eyed skull to suggest the duality of human nature – the symbolic rational and irrational sides of human life. These faces are set in an apocalyptic landscape haunted by looming humanoid

Appel's breakthrough period just after the official end of Cobra, when he built on the experimental foundations of the movement to develop his own unique approach to a highly material painting. This work is especially significant to Appel's relationship to U.S. audiences as it comes from Martha Jackson, the dealer who gave Appel his first solo exhibition in New York in 1954. The creatures inhabiting the roof shown here, reminiscent of the pigeons commonly kept on city rooftops in the early 20th-century, seem part bird and part some other creature. Appel focuses our attention above all on the brutal directness of color and paint application.

Henry Heerup's uniquely carved, painted stones demonstrate the Cobra artists' interest in art forms that link human subjectivity with the animal and mineral worlds, as well as to earthly materials and elements.

Henry Heerup was a member of the Høst (Harvest) Group (1938-48)—a Danish group that predated Cobra—and worked mainly in painting and sculpture. Strongly influenced by Romanesque imagery and folk art, especially from Scandinavian sources, Heerup's sculptures are raw, witty, and playful. This painted stone snake seems to dwell in a state of ambiguity. Its blazing red eyes seem alive, yet set in rigid

global society where humans are increasingly confronted with radical social inequalities and the necessity of responding productively to social and environmental disasters, the contemporary legacy of Cobra recalls the importance of collective experience in defining personal subjectivity as well as political change. In an age where sculpture can be 3-D printed and paintings rendered digitally, these artists foreground the unpredictability of human art-making with a profound recognition of mass culture as well as art historical precedents. Working in a variety of media, these artists imbue their interpretations of contemporary experience with a defiant spirit and material intensity comparable to the art of Cobra.

THE LEGACY OF COBRA

Following the official end of Cobra in 1951, the spirit of the movement continued and manifested in a number of different artistic collaborations and movements, such as the Situational International, which explored collective experience, urbanism, and politics in postwar era. Years later, in the 21st-century, contemporary artists continue to work in the radical legacy of Cobra. In the face of new economic and social challenges, they demonstrate the ongoing relevance of artistic experimentation and creativity in an increasingly technophilic and entertainment-driven global capitalist culture.

The artists represented are either directly inspired by or in active dialogue with the artists of Cobra. Their work foregrounds art's active role in society as a catalyst for political and social reform. Often humorous, political, and inspired by popular art or mass culture, this work speaks to the continued interest in the potential and pitfalls of the human animal. Whether a distinctive figurative image can be seen in the work, or merely the hint of a biomorphic form, this work maintains Cobra's rejection of either pure abstraction or figurative naturalism, developing imagery in transformation which invites multiple interpretations among a diverse audience. These artists develop new approaches to Cobra's playful use of animal imagery and folk or children's art to both celebrate and critique elements of violence, industrialization, and depersonalization in modern society. The focus on bestial forms resonates in the present day. In a complex

Henry Heerup (Danish, 1907-1993)
Untitled, 1950
Painted stone
12 x 14 x 14 ¼ inches (30.5 x 35.6 x 36.2 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection; M-698

stone. It is an animal, but not an entirely active one.

While most of its body surface consists of bare stone, its eyes and its nose are colorfully painted. The simple red dot of the eye and blunt, bright blue eyebrow make it difficult to determine whether the figure is looking to the front or the side. The contours of its body appear smooth and soft, yet the materiality of stone is always present. These multiple dimensions of ambiguity give the sculpture an uncanny presence. The ambiguous status of the figure recalls Cobra's interest in the snake as a mythic mediator in many cultures between the natural world, the human, and the spiritual.

Asger Jorn (Danish, 1914-1973)
Den Røde jord (The Red Earth), 1954
Lithograph
38.25 x 53 inches (97.2 x 134.6 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale,
The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection;
M-148

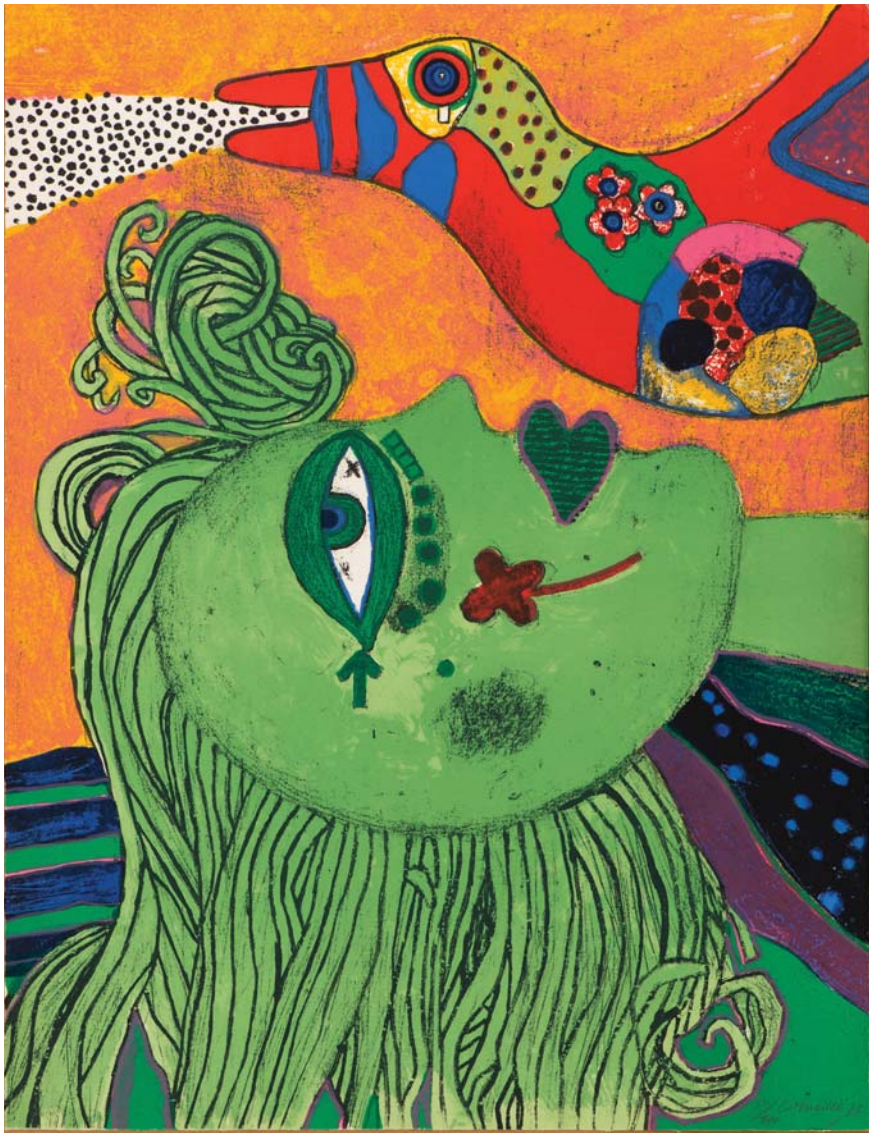
Jorn created this monumental print not long after he returned to his rural hometown of Silkeborg, Denmark, to recover from tuberculosis. *The Red Earth* (Den Røde jord) exemplifies his radical experiments with printmaking. Printed in two parts, together measuring 38 ¼ x 53 inches, *The Red Earth* is one of the largest prints he made in Silkeborg and one of Jorn's rarest impressions. Working in close collaboration with Danish printmakers Permild and Rosengreen, he only printed an edition of 30, with a few known trial proofs and several color variants, of which this is one of the most vivid and intensely colored. This print exemplifies Jorn's experiments in calligraphic imagery. The forms suggest biomorphic figures, composed in several groups including a line of diminutive figures at the top right of the print, which invite the viewer to decipher their meaning.

"Pas de puisance d'imagination sans images puisante" is one of four lithographic posters Asger Jorn created in support of the alliance between students and workers of the May 1968 protests in France. During the protests, Sorbonne University students, along with members of the Situationist International, including Guy Debord and Michèle Bernstein, took over academic buildings and protested the conservative government, aiming for a political and cultural revolution. Inspired by the students, factory workers joined the protests and the revolution quickly erupted into a national movement. The May 1968 protests prompted heated confrontations between students, administrators, workers, and the police. After a few dramatic weeks that brought the French economy to a complete shutdown, they reached their limit—but not without instigating a cultural revolution. Amidst his characteristic abstract forms and expressive brushstrokes, Jorn's easily readable and proactive message develops the abstract insights of his later paintings. The poster brings into focus the synthesis between Situationist experiments creating artistic actions in urban spaces and post-Cobra responses to the rapidly changing social transformations of the 1960s. The message is written in Jorn's playful non-academic French, evoking the graffiti scrawled all over the Left Bank by protesting students. Roughly translated as "no power to the imagination without powerful images," it describes an essential component to revolutionary transformation. It is not enough to overthrow oppressive institutions; activists must do the critical work of imagining alternative structures to take the place of the old. Jorn places "powerful images" at the heart of this second component of revolutionary transformation. They demonstrate one of Cobra's legacies: images that draw personal expression and political message into a single dynamic visual impact.

Asger Jorn (Danish, 1914-1973)
Untitled, 1968
One of a set of four lithographs
19.5 x 12 inches (49.5 x 30.5 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale,
The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection; M-274

The creatures stand out against the red background that dominates the composition, perhaps a reference to Communist politics. One large creature outlined in scribbly navy blue and accented with light purple at left takes up the largest amount of space, almost the entire left half of the print. A group of smaller creatures situate themselves within the larger creature's lower half. Both the creature's size and its position in the foreground suggest a symbolic importance. Perhaps it acts as a protector of sorts, or possible even represents the image of Honoré de Balzac, a favorite writer of Jorn's referenced in his 1952 essay "Menneskedyret" (The Human Animal). The playful figures who sport eyes, mouths, beaks, talons, and other limbs exemplify Jorn's spontaneous, animalistic, and highly symbolic approach to art.

Tajiri, as a Japanese-American, had to face the deep complexities of his double cultural identity. Despite his U.S. citizenship, due to his Japanese heritage he was imprisoned, along with his family, in an internment camp after Pearl Harbor. He volunteered for the army to escape internment in 1943, only to be wounded in Italy, an experience that led to his series of "Warrior" sculptures, pacifist statements that drew upon both western and Japanese traditions of representing soldiers and samurai. He studied with Ossip Zadkine in Paris after the war, where he met the Dutch Cobra artists and became the only American to participate in Cobra exhibitions. He began collecting found materials on the banks of the Seine to make playful assemblages, and later made sculptures of many different materials and techniques in the Netherlands. He was influenced by Pablo Picasso, Henri



Corneille (Dutch, 1922-2010)
Sans Titre (*Untitled*) from the series *Herbes* (*Grass*), 1973
Gouache and watercolor on lithograph
28.875 x 20.75 inches (72.2 x 52.7 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection; M-693.f

Corneille traveled frequently to Mexico and the Caribbean, taking inspiration from the tropical scenery, vivid colors, and patterns of these cultures' folk art. His series of *Herbes* (*Grass*) lithographs are among his boldest, most expressive graphic images, depicting a dreamlike world of female figures communing with animals and birds. The bird is one of the most consistent motifs in Corneille's work. In a preface to his album of six lithographs *Volgelvluchten* (*Flight of the Birds*) in 1960, he writes: "The bird is the most perfect image of movement. It is not only movement towards a goal, but also joy in movement for its own sake.... They seek only pure movement, the pure pleasure of movement. It is that movement which I am seeking." Corneille sought such a free and lively life in traveling all around the world. In *Herbes* (*Grass*), a mysterious green woman looks with a seductive gaze towards a colorful and vibrant bird above her. Is Corneille identifying himself as the bird, receiving the loving gaze of the woman below? This interpretation would be supported by his frequent depiction of women as colorful and mysterious erotic objects. Or could the woman and bird be communing together, in a fantasy of escape from the everyday realities that constrain human existence? Corneille has drawn on world myths in order to envision his own.

Shinkichi Tajiri (American, 1923-2009)
Warrior, ca. 1950
Welded copper
26 x 12 inches (66 x 30.5 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection; M-79.35

Matisse and Henry Moore, but perhaps most importantly, fellow American expatriate sculptor Alexander Calder. The spindly forms that characterize this work emphasize his connection to Calder's playful surrealist abstraction. They also express his resistance to the oppression he experienced in the U.S. as a Japanese-American. Cobra poet Christian Dotremont describes Tajiri's aggressive aesthetics in *L'Arbre et l'Arme* (1953): "Tajiri's aggression is at once the expression of our age--which stems directly from that era of which Hiroshima was one of the major events--and, at the same time, a response to that age." Tajiri's sculpture from the period just after the war is frank and immediate, suggesting the extremely personal and violent effects of war that he experienced.

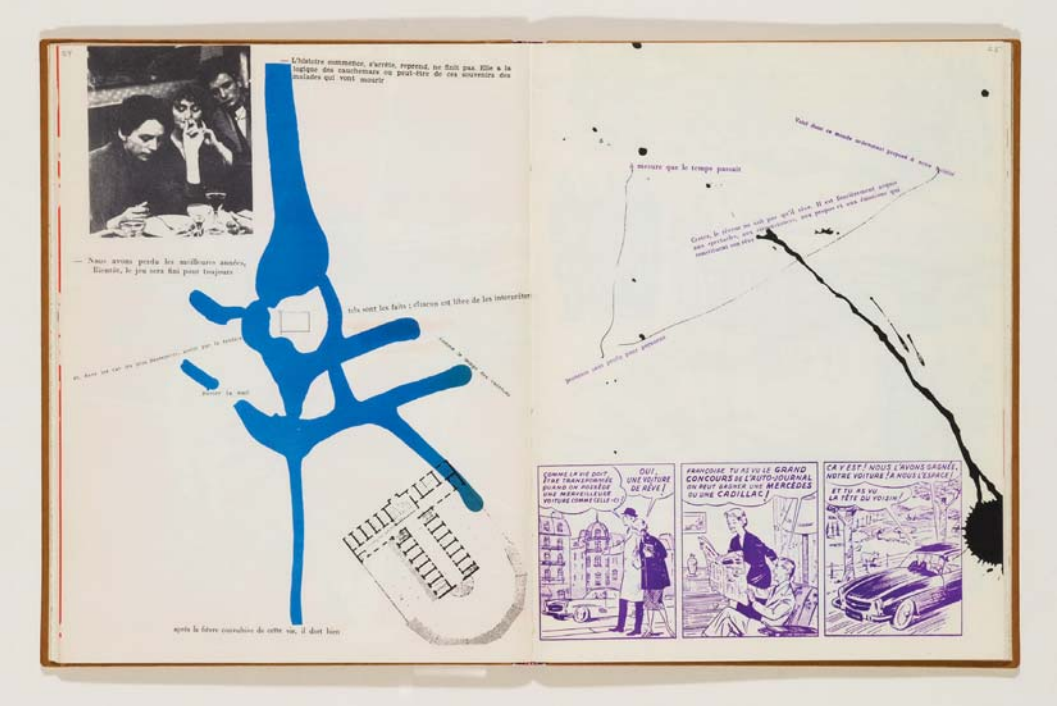
Jorn's composition of semi-abstract creatures exemplifies his concept of the human animal, a playful, possibly satirical representation of people's animalistic instincts and desires. Created while recovering from tuberculosis in his rural hometown of Silkeborg, Denmark after the disbandment of Cobra, the painting develops Jorn's Cobra style of spontaneity and experimentation in a newly pastoral direction. Jorn's idea of the human animals reimagines art as a political allegory capable of enacting a social transformation. As in the earlier Cobra period, the semi-abstract creatures are defined by prominent eyes, bared teeth, and ambiguous limbs, inviting a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. As a form of political commentary on the ongoing violence of the Cold War and the atomic bomb, the figures symbolically represent the destructive instincts of the human animals. Upon his return to Denmark, Jorn also reinvigorated his interest in the traditional Scandinavian art of his homeland, often overlooked in accounts of western high culture which he therefore labeled "Nordic folk art." As a reinterpretation of ancient Scandinavian or Viking art, which also often featured animal imagery, the figures symbolically represent a continuation of the expressive styles of his ancestors in a modern movement. By depicting several figures and no clear, primary subject, Jorn rejects heroic human imagery in favor of creaturely symbols, relating to social interactions and ancient Nordic traditions.

Asger Jorn (Danish, 1914-1973)
Untitled, 1952
Oil on panel
19.5 x 15.25 inches (49.5 x 38.7 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale,
The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection;
M-79.24

interplay of shapes and symbols that take on the function of words reflects the Cobra legacy of experimentation with multiple creative disciplines and artistic mediums. Isolated curvilinear lines form the shapes of creaturely heads that stand for figures in a collective scene of festivity. The dark green and blue lines contrast with the vibrant yellows and orangey reds that inhabit the shapes and faces they suggest. On the bottom left side of the painting a dark brown stain disrupts the colorful grid-like pattern and adds an ominous presence to an otherwise jovial composition. Drips and spatters of paint animate the surface and make the figures seem as if coming to life.

Pierre Alechinsky (Belgian, b. 1927)
Parmi Nous (Among Us), 1965
Acrylic on paper and canvas
40.75 x 61.625 x 1. 125 inches (103.5 x 156.5 x 2.9 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, The Golda and Meyer Marks Cobra Collection; M-78.2

Alechinsky joined the Cobra movement after meeting poet Christian Dotremont at the Cobra exhibition “The End and the Means” at the Palais des Beaux-Arts in Brussels in 1949. Alechinsky worked closely with Dotremont on the Cobra magazine and worked collaboratively with many other Cobra artists in his Brussels studio, Les Ateliers du Marais. Among Us (Parmi nous) exemplifies Alechinsky’s mature post-Cobra breakthrough in the early 1960s. Stylistically indebted to the work of Danish artist Asger Jorn, Alechinsky grasped the connection between shapes and words and refined the monstrous imagery of Cobra into his own unique symbolic language. The



Asger Jorn (Danish, 1914-1973) and Guy Debord (French, 1931-1994)
Mémoires (*Memoirs*)
Artist's book, offset lithography, printed by Permild og Rosengreen, Copenhagen,1958;
Published by Internationale Situationniste, Paris, 1959
11 x 8.3 inches (28 x 21 cm)
Collection of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Museum Library Fund; 83.6

This text exemplifies the collaborative approach of the post-Cobra Situationist International movement (1957-1972). Co-created by Jorn and French filmmaker Guy Debord, who gathered the reproduced texts, *Mémoires* (*Memoirs*) blends multiple disciplines, including painting, visual culture, poetry, journalistic and sociological writing to present a radical aesthetic strategy. Encased in a sandpaper cover in order to "destroy" any adjacent book on the shelf, the book consciously refers to the avant-garde legacy of collage, with its unstable and messy combinations of symbols, meanings, and theories critiquing the standard definitions of culture. Mémoires consists entirely of pre-existing texts appropriated from printed sources juxtaposed with architectural diagrams, images of comic strips, history paintings, and Jorn's abstract drawn and painted forms. It creates a fragmented story of the past constructed from unnamed sources, punctuated with Debord's own photographs of the Lettrist International (1952–57)—

the group that preceded the Situationist International. The imagery is complimented by Jorn's abstract art, which retains the spontaneous experimental approach of Cobra but adds a literary catalogue of doodles, ink blots, and scratchings-out. The amalgamation of text and image fragments refers obliquely to the early experiences of the Lettrists as radical outsiders navigating the backstreets of Paris as they developed a critical perspective on mainstream culture. The seeming spontaneity and random placement of text, appropriated images, and strips of color resemble a map drawn by hand, with all the sharp curves and narrow side streets that set the stage for the urban explorations of the Situationists. The texts can be read as symbolic or metaphoric. Words and pictures combine to form a secret language or private intellectual map, shaped out of the published relics of a culture that the Situationists believed was defined by the imagery of control and the passive experience of spectacle. *Mémoires* recodes the language of mass culture and allows the articulation of various (in)visible meanings and subjects.