

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Avant-Garde Won't Give Up: Cobra and Its Legacy

Blum & Poe, New York: September 9 – October 17, 2015

Opening reception: Wednesday, September 9, 6 – 8 pm

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles: November 5 – December 23, 2015

Opening reception: Thursday, November 5, 6 – 8 pm



Asger Jorn, *L'avant-garde se rend pas*, 1962

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New York, July 7, 2015—Blum & Poe announces *The Avant-Garde Won't Give Up: Cobra and Its Legacy*, a two-part exhibition taking place in New York and Los Angeles which will offer a broad and critical reassessment of Cobra—an essential postwar European movement named for the home cities Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam. The exhibition will follow the solo exhibition of Karel Appel, one of the movement's key protagonists, presented at Blum & Poe, New York in September 2014. Named after a seminal work by Cobra founder Asger Jorn (Danish, 1914-73), *The Avant-Garde Won't Give Up* pays tribute to Jorn's catalyzing role and to the movement's enduring aesthetic and conceptual influence on artists working today.

The exhibition's first part at Blum & Poe, New York will begin with the nexus of experimental practices and political activities of a group of Danish modernist artists during the Nazi occupation and will continue with the emergence of Cobra in the late 1940s. The second half of the exhibition at Blum & Poe, Los Angeles will trace the impact and legacy of Cobra in the art of the 1950s and 60s through the present day by juxtaposing historical work with a selection of contemporary

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practices. Independent curator and art historian Alison M. Gingeras has organized both exhibitions.

Cobra is frequently remembered as a style of Northern European painting—merging figuration and abstraction—that emerged in the traumatic wake of World War II. In an American academic context, Cobra's importance is often measured through the narrow filter of their eponymous journal, which featured the writings of Constant, Asger Jorn, Christian Dotremont, and other members. The exhibition seeks to rectify these reductive understandings of the movement in the United States by exposing a layered and multi-tentacled avant-garde movement, spanning three decades and many more countries than just Denmark, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

The exhibition will begin in New York with a re-examination of the artist collective Helhesten (The Hell Horse), the precursor to Cobra, which Jorn founded in 1941 in the midst of Nazi-occupied Denmark. This group of politically committed, progressive artists seized the Nordic mythical figure of the “hell horse” as their emblem. Jorn, along with artists such as Sonja Ferlov Mancoba, Henry Heerup, Egill Jacobsen, and Carl-Henning Pedersen among others, shared an interest in an exploration of ancient folk art, populist art forms, and the legacy of Surrealism in defiance of their anti-Modernist German occupiers. With Jorn's federating charisma, the Helhesten group spawned the formal seeds that would later animate Cobra. Art historian Kerry Greaves has recently written of Helhesten, “they provide a crucial link between the historical and post-war avant-garde, and without [Helhesten] there would have been no Cobra.” The selection of Helhesten paintings, sculptures, drawings, and other ephemera will be one of the few occasions that these Danish artists have been recognized in an American exhibition context.

Moving beyond the formative years of Helhesten, the exhibition will trace the confluence of Jorn's collective with other groups, such as the Dutch Experimental Group and the Belgian Revolutionary Surrealists, to eventually form Cobra from 1948 to 1951. Unified by a keen interest in Marxism, Cobra saw itself as a “red international” that rejected Western aesthetics, embraced spontaneity, collaborative work methods, and drew inspiration from children's drawings, the art of the insane, and primitivism. The exhibition will feature a re-reading of the key protagonists of Cobra—Pierre Alechinsky, Karel Appel, Constant, Christian Dotremont, and Jorn—as well as foreground lesser-known figures beyond the home countries for which the movement is named. In particular, artists such as Ernest Mancoba (a South African artist who had settled in Denmark and later Paris and was married to Sonja Ferlov Mancoba, a sculptor and key figure in the Helhesten group), and Shinkichi Tajiri (a Japanese-American sculptor and painter who eventually settled in the Netherlands after serving in WWII).

The latter half of the exhibition, taking place in Los Angeles, will cast its view beyond the formal ending of Cobra in 1951 by following the political activities and aesthetic experiments of Asger Jorn through the 1950s to his death in 1973. Including later “modification paintings” (interventions or *détournements* on anonymous paintings bought in flea markets), abstract paintings utilizing unconventional materials, and experimentations with ceramics and textiles, Jorn's later output shows the fruition of many of the ideas that first germinated in the Cobra period. While maintaining his exchange with Cobra artists, Jorn also widened his circle of collaboration and exchange with members of the Italian neo-avant-garde, such as Enrico Baj and Lucio Fontana, as well as artists such as Jean Dubuffet.

The Avant-Garde Won't Give Up will argue that Cobra did not end with the formal disbanding of the group in 1951. In fact, Cobra's ideas and aesthetics were only realized in the two decades that followed—blossoming into a relentless multinational, literary, political, and radically polymath exploration of numerous artistic media. In tracing this complex web of artists and ideas, the history that unfolds insists upon a more complex genealogy of one of the least understood, yet important movements of the last sixty years. This broad understanding of Cobra artists' artistic

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and discursive output reveals them to be dynamic figures, whose legacy continues to impact the art of today. To this end, the exhibition in Los Angeles will propose a series of historical and contemporary juxtapositions by a range of living artists. This transgenerational presentation will underscore the urgency of this reexamination of Cobra—by viewing the movement's groundbreaking experiments and ideas through the lens of the present day.

Among artists in the New York exhibition are Pierre Alechinsky, Else Alfelt, Karel Appel, Eugène Brands, Constant, Corneille, Christian Dotremont, Sonja Ferlov Mancoba, Henry Heerup, Egill Jacobsen, Asger Jorn, Ernest Mancoba, Carl-Henning Pedersen, Shinkichi Tajiri, and Raoul Ubac. The Los Angeles exhibition will present work by the core Cobra group from the New York exhibition as well as works by Enrico Baj, Corneille, Mark Flood, Magdalena Suarez Frimkess, Gelatin, Mark Grotjahn, Jacqueline de Jong, Friedrich Kunath, Eddie Martinez, Bjarne Melgaard, Jon Pylypchuk, Reinhoud, Julian Schnabel, Walasse Ting, and more (list of participating artists in formation).

Bringing together rarely exhibited works by several artists who have not been seen in the US for decades, the realization of this exhibition has drawn upon the close, generous collaboration of numerous Cobra artists, estates, families, and private collections. *The Avant-Garde Won't Give Up* also pays homage to the visionary work of the Lefebvre Gallery. Established in New York in 1960 by John Lefebvre and closed in 1986, this trailblazing gallery was one of the few to support and promote the Cobra movement in America.

In keeping with the exhibition's assertion that Cobra has particular resonance with contemporary art practice, artist Julian Hoeber has collaborated with the curator Alison M. Gingeras on an exhibition design that reflects the innovative installations of the first Cobra exhibitions at the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam in 1949 and at the Palais des Beaux-Arts Liège in 1951—both of these exhibitions were designed in collaboration with avant-garde architect Aldo van Eyck. Hoeber's own research-based practice investigates the intersection of architectural history, narrative and aesthetics—bringing an additional layer of transhistorical dialogue to this project.

As part of the run of the New York exhibition, there will be several events, including a book launch for the new monograph *Shinkichi Tajiri: Universal Paradoxes* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), as well as a book launch and discussion with Jacqueline de Jong, an artist, publisher, and founding member of the Situationist International. Her forthcoming artist book *The Case of the Ascetic Satyr* was a collaboration with her romantic partner Asger Jorn. The Book Launch & Artist Talk will take place Wednesday, September 16, 5-7pm at Blum & Poe, New York. A conversation between Jacqueline de Jong and contributing author and art historian Kevin Repp will begin at 6pm followed by a Q&A session.

In conjunction with the exhibition, Blum & Poe will publish a catalog that will include new essays by the exhibition's curator Alison M. Gingeras and three leading scholars who represent a new generation of art historians specialized in Asger Jorn, Helhesten, Belgian Revolutionary Surrealism, and Cobra—Marie Godet, Kerry Greaves, and Karen Kurczynski. The book will be co-published by DelMonico Books • Prestel and will be available in Spring 2016.

About Blum & Poe

Timothy Blum and Jeffrey Poe founded Blum & Poe in September 1994 with the intent to show international contemporary art in all media. Blum brought over five years of experience in the Japanese art world, and Poe provided a strong awareness of emerging artists in Los Angeles. Together they have represented an increasingly influential roster of contemporary artists, most since the start of their careers, including Sam Durant, Anya Gallaccio, Mark Grotjahn, Friedrich

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Kunath, Florian Maier-Aichen, Dave Muller, Takashi Murakami, and Yoshitomo Nara. In 2009 Blum & Poe purchased and renovated their current 22,000 square foot complex on La Cienega Boulevard, where they have held museum-caliber surveys, examining the work of the Japanese Mono-ha artists (2012); the Korean Tansaekhwa monochrome painters (2014); and the European postwar movement Cobra (2015). In 2014, Blum & Poe opened galleries in New York and Tokyo to focus on intimately scaled projects, both cutting edge and historical, in tandem with an expansive program of exhibitions, lectures, performances, book-signings, and concerts at its base in Los Angeles.

Locations:

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, 2727 S La Cienega Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90034

Blum & Poe, New York, 19 East 66th Street, New York, NY 10065

Blum & Poe, Tokyo, 1-14-34 Jingumaeshibuya, Tokyo, 150-0001

Currently on view:

Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, July 2 – August 22, 2015:

A.L. Steiner: Come & Go

Anthony Burdin: Fragments from Expeditions: Destitution, Deterioration, and Devastation

Drew Heitzler: Pacific Palisades

Hours:

Los Angeles, Tuesday – Saturday, 10am – 6pm

New York, June 8 – September 8, Monday – Friday, 10am – 6pm

Tokyo, Tuesday – Saturday, 11am – 7pm

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