

Staged in collaboration with the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel, which will host the show starting on 21 January 2012, the exhibition presents a selection of works offering a broad overview of the research that Tim Rollins has conducted since 1982, on art as a form of collaboration and individual creativity as an agent of social change. The art of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. is a poetic tribute to sharing, but it is also a political appeal to individual potential. It blends the sense of measure of the classical culture with the exuberance of the street culture, the search for beauty with the expression of rage, and the tradition of painting with the power of the word as an instrument of denunciation.

When in 1982 Rollins was asked to teach for two weeks at Public School 52 in South Bronx, New York, attended by students from problematic situations and thus considered to be at risk, the artist has faced up the task applying a teaching method based on developing individual abilities through reading and drawing. For Rollins, in fact, social emancipation and liberation of the creative potential within each of us must necessarily go through a form of self-awareness enabled by the access to culture.

From that moment on, the classical and modern authors of literature, philosophy and political theory became the raw material for Rollins and his work group, which chose the name K.O.S. (Kids of Survival).

The writings of Aeschylus, Martin Luther King, Aristophanes, Lewis Carroll, Dante, Gustave Flaubert, Franz Kafka, Homer, William Shakespeare, Malcom X and Carlo Collodi – to name only a few – have been read and discussed by the artist and the group. These authors thus served as a starting point to invent an iconography that was then transferred to large canvases.

Through the “Art and Knowledge” workshop, subsequently established as a permanent training structure, Tim Rollins & K.O.S. have created a series of works that call into question the concept of art understood as an individual process and that link different experiences. Indeed, their oeuvre successfully unites erudition and spontaneity, and brings together various historical references: the delegation of execution and use of the written word as an artistic material typical of Conceptual Art, the political connotation given to the materials of everyday life defined in the Italian Arte Povera movement, the concept of aesthetics as a dimension of social change as theorized by William Morris.

Thirty years after the group was first formed, Rollins continues to work with K.O.S., although many of the individual members have changed over the years to make room for the younger generations.

The title of the exhibition at GAMeC in Bergamo, “On Transfiguration”, clarifies the bond linking the works on display: thematizing the concept of transformation in different ways. This is a leitmotif that can be found throughout the group’s entire creative experience and it is connected not only with the choice of which texts to study but also the visual results of the individual works.

For example, the figure of Pinocchio is central to three of the works on display and it exemplifies this theme. Since Pinocchio is “potentially” a child concealed in a log, he is a metaphor for the educational process and a figure representing possibility and self-expression. At the same time, however, he is also a fantastical figure of the transition from one state of identity to another, an extreme image of transformation that incorporates the main characteristic of the epic hero: complete self-fulfilment only after having performed a series of informative tests.

In the work of Tim Rollins & K.O.S. the concept of “transfiguration” is at once conceptual and symbolic – related to the individual identity – and strictly inherent in the materials and processes used for painting, which sometimes become performance.

In many of the works on display the metamorphosis is represented by the use of inks synthesized with metal, whiskey, apple juice, chine and mustard, or animal blood employed as a pigment. The exhibition is thus a cross-section of their work interpreted through knowledge as a means of individual and collective transformation.

The exhibition features recent works inspired by the Latin philosophical conversations of Giordano Bruno on the infinite possibilities of matter, as well as a selection of works from different periods originating from reflections on texts such as Collodi’s Pinocchio, Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream and Macbeth and Kafka’s Amerika.

In addition to the works inspired by Bruno’s writings, there will also be a new series on paper, created in Bergamo during a workshop that the American artist will conduct in September 2011 with several students from the G. Natta High School of the Applied Sciences, thus emphasizing that his entire oeuvre is based on the principles of education and collaboration.

The exhibition catalogue, published by JRP | Ringier and completed in collaboration with the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel and the Fondazione Galleria Civica in Trento, will be put out in 2012. It will contain critical essays by Nicholas Cullinan, Curator at the Tate Modern in London, and Suzanne Hudson, Associate Professor of Art History at the Center for the Study of Modern Art

at the Phillips Collection in Washington, D.C., and a conversation between Tim Rollins and Alessandro Rabottini, Nikola Dietrich, Curator of the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel, and Andrea Viliani, Director of the Fondazione Galleria Civica in Trento.

The publication will be conceived as a guide to the work of Tim Rollins and K.O.S., analysing the group's artistic method from its formation through today. The objective is to set up an index that groups all the books on which the group has worked: each one will be discussed based on the reasons it was selected, with images of the works inspired by the study of the texts.

The works of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. have been displayed around the world in more than 70 museums and are part of the permanent collections of some of the most prestigious institutions devoted to contemporary art, such as MoMA - Museum of Modern Art in New York, the Tate Modern in London, the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., and the Museum für Gegenwartskunst in Basel.

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