

press information

October 2007

Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

TIM ROLLINS AND K.O.S.: 25 YEARS

October 20 until December 22, 2007

Opening: Friday, October 19, 6 – 8 pm

Galerie Eva Presenhuber is pleased to present a retrospective by American artists Tim Rollins (b. 1955, Maine) and K.O.S. Spanning 25 years of work, the exhibition will include small to large format paintings, drawings, graphic works and a sculpture.

In 1984, Tim Rollins launched the “Art and Knowledge Workshop” in the Bronx, together with a group of youths who named themselves “Kids of Survival” (K.O.S.). Students from South Bronx public schools stemming from a troubled social environment would occupy themselves after school with renowned classical literature from authors such as Shakespeare, Kafka or Aristophanes. Through collective reading, visual associations were generated and transferred onto paper by the artists. Unintentionally, a member of the group painted directly onto a book page, giving birth to the artistic idea of fixing book pages to a canvas onto which selected works of the Kids of Survival could be transferred. Later, musical pieces by Joseph Haydn, Mendelssohn Bartholdy or Richard Strauss were also employed in similar fashion, with the sheet music forming the background for further works. Text and images, universal and individual experiences, are fused together, supplementing each other with their respective vocabularies. The resulting paintings are rich in substance and beauty with a visual language whose spectrum ranges from the abstract and imaginative to the concrete and tangible. “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” is an example of the former. The abstractly depicted flowers are as lyrical as the underlying narrative by Shakespeare. The narrative tells of a flower whose nectar – when it comes in contact with the eyes of a sleeping individual – ensures that he falls in love with the first person he sees on upon waking. The same piece of Shakespearean literature was also the inspiration for the musical piece of the same name by Mendelssohn. The artists show interest in both works, linking them together on various levels.

This conceptual approach is likewise evident in their painting “Invisible Man”. On the book pages of Ralph Ellison’s work, one can make out the letters IM, painted in minimalist fashion. According to Tim Rollins, these refer to the title of the book, and at the same time to the biblical declaration “Im the Lord your God...”, the last two letters of the word “victim” and the speech by Martin Luther King from 1968, “ Im a Man”. Thus, the IM stands for the connection between art, literature, religion and politics – for all that the group seeks to embody in their art.

The influences of art history in the works of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. are unmistakable. An impressive example of this is the large format work, “Animal Farm”, after the book by George Orwell. Tim Rollins first used the novel to arouse an interest in politics in his students. Each member of the group was to associate a political leader of the time with an animal. Historical inspiration was provided by the political caricatures of the 19th Century

by Honoré Daumier or Grandville. The ironical drawings of animals with human heads, which originated in this process, were then transferred to the paintings. We see the result as a grandiose, global political, fenced in arena as an animal farm.

Without doubt, one of the best-known series is “Amerika”, after the novel by Franz Kafka. Golden forms are portrayed, which spread out in all directions. These are primarily trumpets, which appear to transform themselves imaginatively. At the end of Kafka’s novel, the trumpets proclaim freedom and prosperity for all people. “We wanted our art to be joyous and positive”, explains Tim Rollins regarding the creation of “Amerika”. This marks a turning point, from earlier works such as “Frankenstein” which derive inspiration from graffiti styles, and the proud, rebellious youth culture.

The only sculpture in the exhibition carries the title “Pinocchio”, inspired by the account by Carlo Collodi. The work consists of an untreated piece of wood, supplemented by a pair of eyes, replicating the eyes of a K.O.S. member. On the one hand, this is a self-portrayal by the individual “Kids”, on the other hand the sculpture can be viewed as a kind of commentary on the relationship between them and Tim Rollins.

Based on the oratorio by Joseph Haydn, we also exhibit a graphic work from 2004 consisting of seven sheets, symbolising the seven days of creation. Just as expressively as the oratorio, the pages communicate the power and beauty of (the creation of) the world. Abstract black and white forms unfold on the musical sheets, representing light and the dark, the material and nothingness – an alternating game. Here, Tim Rollins intrinsically bonds spirituality with art.

In the newly created works such as “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” after Martin Luther King, or “A Diary of a Young Girl” after Anne Frank, the group occupy themselves more intensely with biographical texts. Here too, the socio-political demands of the authors, tied to faith in social change, are elementary to the work of Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

Many works of the artists are represented in more than 80 public collections – including the MoMA New York, the Art Institute Chicago, the Dia Center of the Arts New York, and the Tate Gallery London. A newly released dissertation by James Romaine, as well as the documentary film receiving awarded a Grammy Award in 1996, attest to the art-historic significance of Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

For further information, please contact Thomas Jarek at Galerie Eva Presenhuber.

Opening times:	Tuesday – Friday	12 noon – 6 pm
	Saturday	11 am – 5 pm

Parallel exhibition at the gallery:
Urs Fischer, September 8 – November 17, 2007

Upcoming exhibition at the gallery:
Hugo Markl, January 18 – March 1, 2008