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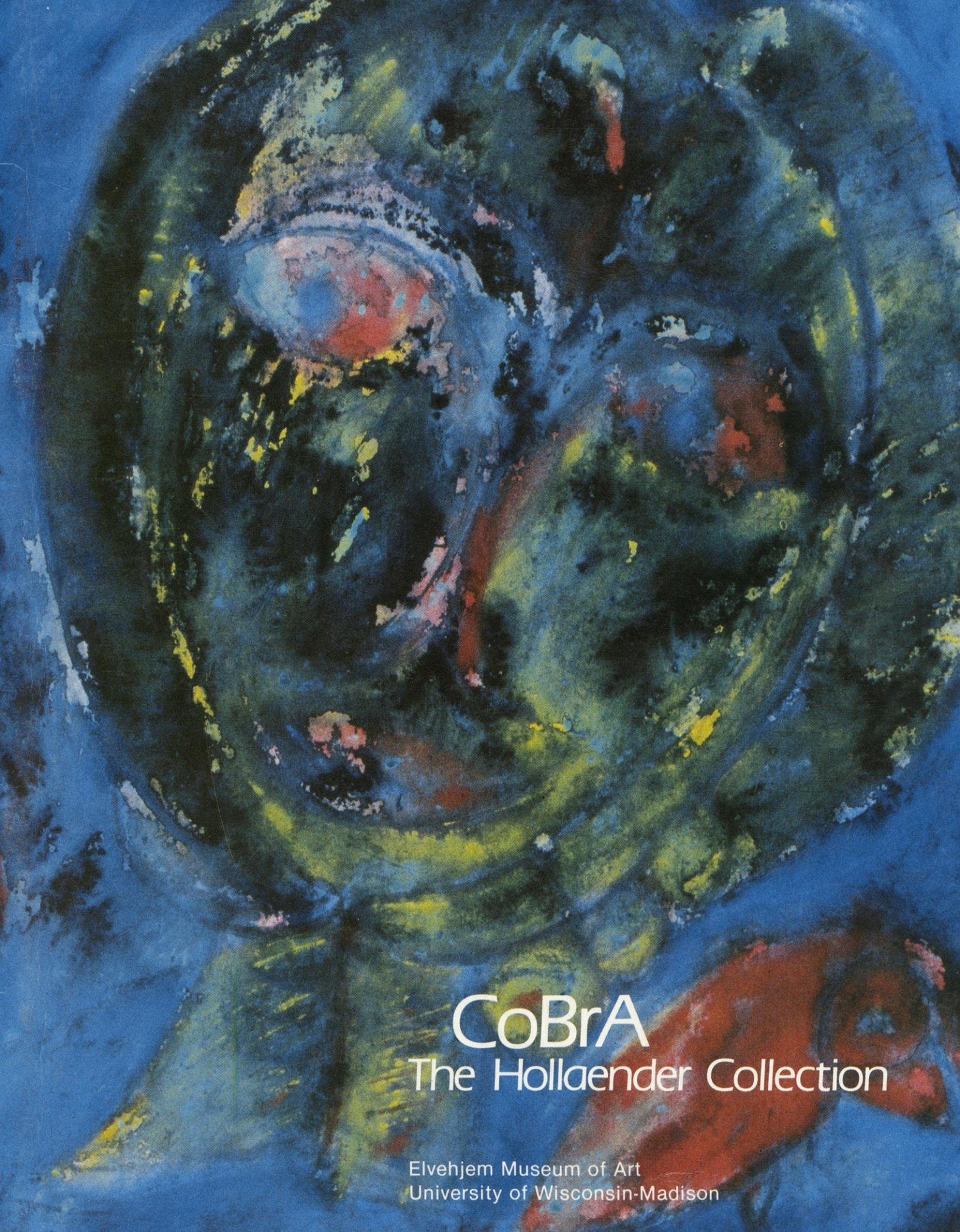
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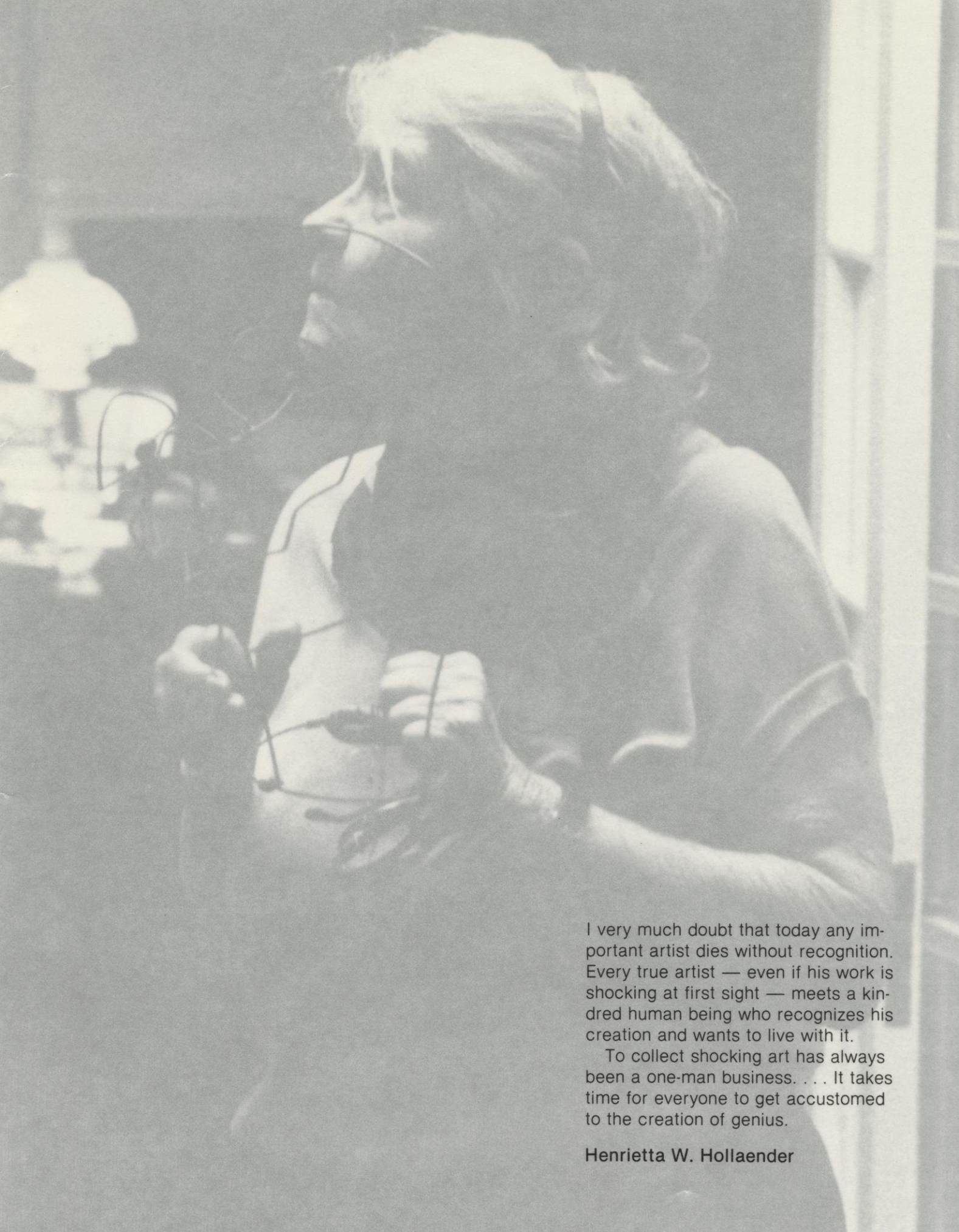
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CoBrA
The Hollaender Collection

Elvehjem Museum of Art
University of Wisconsin-Madison



I very much doubt that today any important artist dies without recognition. Every true artist — even if his work is shocking at first sight — meets a kindred human being who recognizes his creation and wants to live with it.

To collect shocking art has always been a one-man business. . . . It takes time for everyone to get accustomed to the creation of genius.

Henrietta W. Hollaender

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CoBrA

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Elvehjem Museum of Art
University of Wisconsin-Madison
Museum Training Class Spring 1981

Design: Earl J. Madden

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Cover:
Detail from *The Green Dream*
by Carl-Henning Pedersen

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Foreword

In their pursuit of art the true collectors need no compass from others. Trusting their taste and knowledge, they confidently follow their course with a keen sense of adventure and discovery. Recognition is their guide and they bring no maps on their journey.

The territory Alexander and Henrietta Hollaender have chosen to explore, their own time, offers a constantly changing landscape, one in which the frontier is always ahead. It is one they traverse with joy, for every uncharted prospect brings new friends, yet another artist and another work of art, to be greeted and known. New friends join those of last year and those made half a century ago.

The polynational variety of the Hollaenders' collection is astounding. As one moves from print to drawing, to painting, to sculpture, one gazes each time into a different corner of the artistic globe. Yet as each work boldly proclaims its distinctive identity, it shares with the others a clear affinity, as if a same energizing current were coursing through the whole collection.

It is the expressionist spirit of this century's art that the Hollaenders have enthusiastically and most consistently sought out. Exploding upon the artistic world almost eighty years ago in Germany and in France, this spirit has continued to assert itself as an irrepressible force in avant-garde art. Another of its exuberant outbursts, CoBrA, occurred in Northern Europe some forty years later during the aftermath of the Second World War. Recognition of CoBrA in this country, however, has been eclipsed by Abstract Expressionism, the contemporaneous movement that arose in

New York. In a period when American collectors of the avant-garde were jumping on the native bandwagon, the Hollaenders, with their characteristic independence of mind and international outlook, recognized CoBrA as a vital manifestation of expressionism and thus brought to their already impressive collection another new dimension.

True collectors love the art they bring home to live with. They also want others to share in that love. In their willingness to lend their collection of CoBrA works to the Elvehjem, Alexander and Henrietta Hollaender have opened a new territory for the students who wrote this catalogue and invited them and us to share in the joy that discovery brings.

Katherine Harper Mead
Director

Introduction

Any temporary exhibition has a central theme which dictates the selection of the objects and hence the focus of the catalogue essay. The present exhibition has a three-part focus which gives to this project a special significance.

CoBrA. During the middle years of this century, a group of artists from three Northern European countries organized, issued a manifesto and exhibited together for three years (1948-51) under the collective title "CoBrA." This group evolved within the context of the social, political, economic and cultural chaos of post-war Europe, and also in response to a variety of ideas and theories which had gained currency during the first half of the century. CoBrA disbanded as a formal entity after 1951, but the works in this exhibition, which range in date from the late 1940's to the early 1970's, show that its brief existence had a tremendous impact on the later work of the artists who participated in it, as well as on artists who came after. This catalogue, therefore, does not aspire to document CoBrA as a historical phenomenon or to assess its importance to Modern Art. Rather, it is an exploration of those ideas and theories which inspired this movement and which have continued to stimulate the artists involved with it for a generation, as exemplified by the paintings, drawings, prints and sculptures included in this exhibition.

The Hollaenders. Dr. Hollaender is an alumnus of the University of Wisconsin-Madison (AB, 1929; MA, 1930; PhD, 1931); he and his wife have been collecting art for more than half a century.

This is the second exhibition which the Elvehjem has organized from their collection. The first, "Twentieth Century Graphics from the Hollaender Collection," was held in 1974. For me, personally, the organization of this exhibition has provided the opportunity to renew acquaintances with these two avid, engaging and adventurous lovers of art. This selection of CoBrA-related works represents but one aspect of their varied collection. Thus, such an exhibition cannot make a definitive statement about the Hollaenders as collectors, but it does attest to their daring in collecting works by radical, anti-establishment artists at a time when their work was controversial. It also attests to the Hollaenders' perceptions of and their receptiveness to those ideas which motivated the CoBrA group. The boldness which has characterized their collecting over these years stands as a tribute to the Wisconsin tradition of "sifting and winnowing."

The Museum Training Class. The most important activity of the Museum Training and Connoisseurship Course (Art History 600) has traditionally been the organization of an exhibition and the production of a catalogue. Normally, this process has been spread over two semesters; due to lack of staff during the fall semester, the course was shortened to a one-semester offering. The class came together as a group for the first time in late January, knowing little about CoBrA as a movement, little about the details of organizing an exhibition and little about each other. They produced the following essays and catalogue entries, as well as the photographs which illustrate this catalogue, spending long hours researching and writing on CoBrA and its antecedents, in addition to fulfilling all of their other academic commitments.

I am extremely proud of this group of students who so quickly pulled together as a unit, and, with a great spirit of cooperation and dedication, have carried out this project, relying primarily on their own initiative. Truly, they can be said to have received their "baptism of fire" into museum work, and they should derive considerable satisfaction, individually and as a group, for this accomplishment.

Carlton Overland
*Curator of Collections/
Lecturer in Art History*

Acknowledgments

The Museum Training Class (Spring 1981) is proud to have organized this catalogue. We received much help along the way, and it is with deep appreciation that we thank the following people:

Carlton Overland and Anne Lambert, our instructors in the Museum Training Class, for their support and guidance during the preparation of this catalogue.

Loni Hayman for her translation and organization of the research material, as well as assisting in the editing process.

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Museum Training Class

Spring 1981

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An Appreciation

Alexander and Henrietta Hollaender, collectors of this exhibition of CoBrA art, acquired works which possessed shocking and electrifying characteristics — attributes which continue to emanate from the art today.

A personal collection is a cohesive grouping of art reflecting individual tastes, interests, and attitudes toward art. The Hollaenders' philosophy is that the art of one's own lifetime should take precedence over past artistic movements. As private collectors, the Hollaenders deem it important to support artists whose keen insight and ability have led them to make timeless statements through their work. The Hollaenders recognized CoBrA as a significant art movement, a precursor of future movements. The works by CoBrA artists bear witness to the collectors' sense of future developments, and it is no accident that like the collectors the artists drew inspiration from progressive ideologies.

An art collector moved by "gut" reaction sustains an element of excitement. When a collector is guided with such dedication, the collection becomes rewarding in both the esthetic and emotional sense.

It is with great pleasure that the Elvehjem Museum of Art presents a personal collection of CoBrA, the Alexander and Henrietta Hollaender Collection.

M.M., R.Z.

CoBrA

Cobra evokes the image of a venomous reptile rearing its head, ready to strike out at those who would interfere with it. CoBrA, an acronym formed by the initial letters of the cities Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam, designates a short-lived but significant art movement in northern Europe which, through aggressive and revolutionary means, sought to create new forms of expression within the chaotic intellectual and social rubble left by the Second World War. CoBrA — whose founders included Asger Jorn, Christian Dotremont, Karel Appel and Constant Nieuwenhuys — developed an artistic language that relied on spontaneity and experimentation, invoking freshly created myths and folklore inspired by the art of children, the insane and the primitive culture. CoBrA was a group of individual artists who together forged new symbols as they sought to reinterpret images based in the collective unconscious of man.

CoBrA attempted to synthesize the history, philosophical ideas, art and other forms of expression of early twentieth-century Europe into a fresh and vibrant art of its own. Among the most influential contributions to modern thought were the political and economic theories of Karl Marx, and the exploration of the human subconscious, dreams, myth and fantasy being conducted by Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. The development of psychoanalysis had a special impact on the art world, for it provided a viable path to self-exploration, a path which would later become an integral part of many artistic movements.

The work of August Strindberg may be viewed as the pivot between the increasing explorations of the human psyche in the twentieth century, and

the nineteenth-century notion of empirically verifiable reality. Strindberg, a recognized forerunner of Expressionism in drama, was influenced by the teachings of Freud whose theories were dynamically and comprehensively incorporated in Strindberg's "Dream Play" of 1901.

The term "expressionism" was first used in 1901 to describe the art of Van Gogh and Gauguin insofar as they expressed their visions of life in subjective terms. This subjectivism was explored by many artistic groups in the years before World War I. One of the most influential, both visually and theoretically, was *Die Brücke* (The Bridge). Formed in Dresden in 1905 by the German artists Kirchner, Bleyl, Heckel, and Schmidt-Rottluff, its manifesto called for the "freedom of life and of movement against the long-established older forces."¹ The visual unity of *Die Brücke* was most evident in the use of bold, harsh outlines and strong colors that evinced the admiration of its artists for primitive art.

In 1911, an Expressionist group emerged that closely followed the concepts of *Die Brücke*, known as *Der Blaue Reiter* (Blue Rider). This new collective, formed in Munich by Kandinsky and Marc, drew its imagery from the primitive arts and the art of children. Though it lacked the dogmatic cohesion of its predecessors, *Der Blaue Reiter* group made its mark by developing a distinct symbolism for colors, and by a new move toward abstraction.²

Expressionism was also a term that described the literature, drama and film of Germany during the years between 1910 and 1929. The weekly review "Der Sturm" became the "showcase" for Expressionism in literature and drama. Adopting a messianic tone, the Ex-

pressionist writers sought to transform the world from its increasing dependence on materialism, and were clearly influenced by the works of Strindberg, Freud, Jung, and others. In film, Expressionism was characterized by distortions that evoked nightmarish images and became the means by which directors such as Robert Wine, in "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari" (1919), could stylize states of madness.

In addition to German Expressionism, other twentieth-century movements in Europe were to prove influential for the subsequent genesis of CoBrA. Italian Futurism (founded in 1909), fanatically celebrated a mechanized society, while Dada (founded in Switzerland in 1916) was "grounded in . . . skepticism engendered by disgust and horror for a world that could produce a global war."³ The main characteristics of Dada relied on the elements of chance, spontaneity, and the juxtaposition of disparate elements, forming the basis from which the major movement of Surrealism grew.

Guillaume Apollinaire, poet, critic and playwright, originated the descriptive term "surrealism" in 1917. It was André Breton, in 1924, who codified Surrealism into a literary movement that expanded to include the visual arts. This movement was developed from Breton's profound appreciation of Freud's psycho-analytic techniques, and his translation of them into the unique concept of automatism, which Breton defined as:

. . . pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought. Though dictated in the absence of all control exerted by reason, and outside all aesthetic or moral preoccupations.⁴

Shock effects were created that defied rationality and causality through juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated objects and through the transformation or violation of forms. Central to Surrealism in its various forms of expression — film, theatre, literature and painting — was the experience of the waking dream, that tenuous state between consciousness and sub-consciousness.

In Europe, Surrealism was the dominant avant-garde movement of the late 1920's and of the 1930's, and counted among its adherents Dali, Miró, Magritte, Max Ernst and Delvaux. Paul Klee, although not a Surrealist himself, may be seen as having been influenced by surrealist elements. He incorporated these with the structure of Cubism (as exemplified by Braque and Picasso) to form fantastic, childlike images with a geometric thrust.⁵

The artists who founded CoBrA were heirs to the visual sensibilities of the German Expressionists and shared their interest in primitive imagery, but it was Surrealism that provided the theoretical basis of the movement. From this Surrealist influence arose a shared concern for the use of figural imagery to depict man's subconscious.⁶ As with Surrealism, content, rather than structure, was a dominant factor. Like Klee, the CoBrA artists had an active interest in the art of children and psychotics.⁷

No discussion of the influences on CoBrA would be complete without noting that the group had a negative basis as well. The artists of CoBrA were repelled by the non-objective, rectilinear art of Mondrian and *De Stijl*. The direct correspondent to the Constructivist movement in Russia, Mondrian and the *De Stijl* movement emerged in the Netherlands in 1917.

Mondrian's early works further reduced the spatial concepts of his cubist predecessors, and his art led him closer to the expression of "pure plastics." He was to become the principal artist in the movement of Neo-Plasticism, known for its geometric, abstract approach to painting. His purpose was to present nature and reality in painting, and he attempted to achieve this by removing particularities of form that obscured pure reality.⁸ In its strict geometric format, the art of *De Stijl* was far too sterile for CoBrA's mode of expression. Constant, the author of the CoBrA manifesto, aspired to "refill the virgin canvas of Mondrian."⁹

In formulating their manifesto in late 1948, CoBrA drew ideas and membership from an international base, though Dutch influence proved strongest. A group of Dutch "Experimentalists" had formed earlier in 1948 in Amsterdam, and it was this group that drew the attention and recognition of Wim Sandberg, then director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. As had been the case with Dada and Surrealism, this group of closely connected artists included both poets and painters.

Before the internationalism of CoBrA emerged, the Dutch Experimentalists published the group's ideas on art in their review entitled "Reflex." These ideas were soon assimilated into CoBrA, for the thoughts of the Dutch Experimentalists quickly gained an international appeal. It was during the conference of the *Centre Internationale de Documentation sur l'Avant-Garde* in Paris in November of 1948 that Christian Dotremont, a Belgian poet and essayist, and the Dutch painter Constant consolidated Danes, Belgians and Dutchmen into the group of CoBrA.¹⁰

Between the years 1948 and 1951 the artists organized several exhibitions and continued publishing their thoughts on art and Western culture. Although CoBrA as an artistic entity dissolved in 1951, the three years in which the group remained together had a profound influence on the artists involved in the years that followed.

K.K., M.J.S., D.J.W.

We made good comrades. CoBrA was the only real new movement after the war in Europe. . . . The CoBrA group started new, and first of all we threw away all these things we had known, and started afresh, like a child, fresh and new.

Karel Appel

The art of CoBrA distinguishes itself from the other tendencies of its time in its point of departure which represents a new optics of abstract art. One could say that it is an abstract art that does not believe in abstraction.

Asger Jorn

Once again it is shown what enormous creative forces slumber in man's nature. We shall open the way for an activation of these forces by the destruction of the last formalisms that stand in the way of their development.

Constant Nieuwenhuys

For all concerned, CoBrA had been a refreshing adventure with very happy moments. There had been keen rivalry, but also a concentration of all that was young and promising.

Anton Rooskens

The intelligence and creative thoughts are ignited in their encounter with the unknown, the unexpected, the accidental, disorder, the absurd, the impossible.

*Asger Jorn*¹¹

In its imagery, CoBrA represented a break from the established norms of artistic expression. The artists of CoBrA felt the time had come to free art from restrictive formalisms. They wished to forge a new artistic language that transcended the trappings of society and civilization. This would enable spontaneous expression of the human psyche, within which they felt lay the creative forces that formal art held imprisoned. As Jorn stated, painting "is the invitation to dispensing energy without a precise goal."¹² Without intentional restrictions of expression, the artists could communicate pure fundamental human truths as well. Corneille summed up the impetus behind the art of CoBrA when he said, "we were boxed in by squares. We had only one desire: to get out of this too tight corset and start a gigantic disorder."¹³ Spontaneity and experimentalism not only characterized the imagery, but also the techniques and choice of materials utilized by the artists.

The new imagery of CoBrA emerged in joyous freedom, unharnessed by premeditated design, intellectual ordering of symbols, or the creation of a pleasing aesthetic. Its language was characterized by a blend of mythology, folk art, pictographs, as well as the art of the child and the primitive. These were united by a common bond of fantasy. Jean Dubuffet was a kindred spirit to the artists of CoBrA though not himself a member of the group; of his

collection entitled "Art Brut," which consisted of art work by the insane, primitive people and children, he stated, "we witness here the artistic process in all its purity, raw, reinvented on all its levels by the maker."¹⁴

Childlike Images

The art of children held a special fascination for the artists of CoBrA, representing two of the most basic displays of artistic expression. "Did you ever watch a child paint? There is complete honesty. Even if the finished drawing seems totally imaginative or just a wild fantasy, you can discover under all these spatters and doodles true dedication."¹⁵ The artists of CoBrA employed childlike symbols to recapture and express an "essential force."

Interest in children's imagery began in the Netherlands. Appel took the wavering lines of a child's drawing and changed them to an expression of emotional force. As Hugo Claus has pointed out, "The tension in his colors, his acknowledgement of matter and his plastic quality combine to create a deeper dimension which is rarely seen in children's drawings."¹⁶ The drawing style of *Cat. Nos. 13 and 14* by Appel (1950) at first glance appears to duplicate a child's scribbling. Yet, on closer examination the forms refer the viewer to artistic predecessors while they undermine their own childlike veneer with sophisticated use of materials and complex manipulation of particulars. Appel's method is in accord "with the slight exaltation, the buoyant freshness with which he tries to entrap his world in the ramifications of his forms."¹⁷

Childlike figures are able to represent the human as a caricature. The untitled work by Constant of 1949 (*Cat. No. 17*) portrays a clumsy being,

recognizable as a human form. The floating figure is too big for the space: the face which takes precedence acts to arrest the viewer's attention, and establish communication. The image evoked the same response as the Appel figure, for the same expressive humanism is present.

Primitive Images

Primitive imagery is also used by the artists as a basic mode of expression. As with the art of children, the simplified forms are brought to the foreground, and rather than representing a distinct personality, the image plays a "primitive role," acting as the vehicle for the direct transfer of pure emotional energy. The *Clown* (1954), by Karl Appel (Cat. No. 11), resembles a primitive type of mask. The image is so close to the viewer that it actually becomes the being who appears to emerge from the frame of the work. Large eyes stare out of the canvas. Like many of the works in the collection, the composition of *The Clown* is free and unordered. The figure does not narrate, but stands out starkly from its unrelated surroundings. Expressive of raw emotion, it is meant to evoke a reaction in all who view it.



Asger Jorn, *Conference a 7*, 1953

Myth and Fantasy

Myth and folklore are subjects which intrigued all CoBrA artists. "Myth is a structure, a real phenomenon of an expression of thought. Myth is a phenomenon that manifests itself to consciousness . . . abnormal or extraordinary only to the extent that reality is the same . . ." ¹⁸ The Danes, Jorn and Pederson, were interested in the archaic myths and folklore of Scandinavia for their freshness and simplicity. Though inspired by old sources, Jorn and Pederson created their own myths and mythical creatures. Indeed, all of the artists in CoBrA invented myths peopled by imaginary figures. These figures represented the artists' reality and that of mankind. The mythical creatures were comprised of an array of birds, beasts, goblins, and deformed human shapes. The forms, like other CoBrA symbols, are invested with human traits, drawing the viewer into the fantasy world of the canvas, and acting as vehicles to express the artist's subconscious.

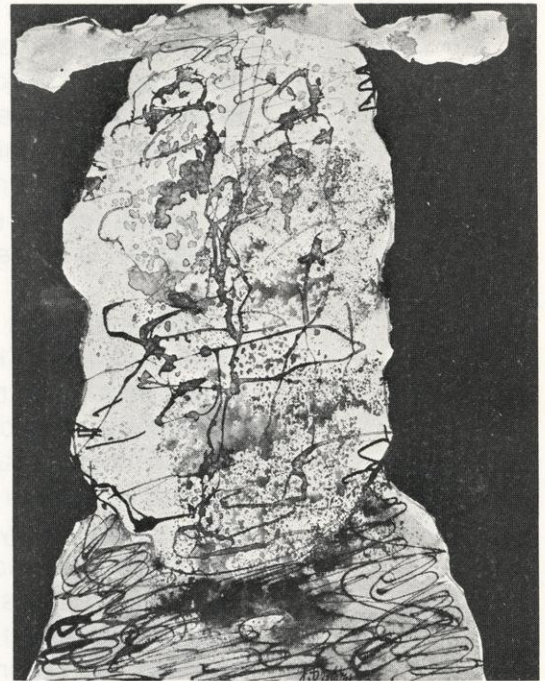
The figures of Jorn are clouded in mystery, and provoke visions of dream and magic. In his print entitled *Conférence à 7* of 1953 (Cat. No. 4), Jorn depicts a menagerie of zoomorphic images. The minute forms are unidentifiable, yet their faces are distinct. They convey the viewer to a faraway fantasy world, and communicate elusive human expressions. Playful yet disturbing, they represent a fleeting glimpse of Jorn's mental imagery. Pederson creates a vivid dream world in his watercolors. *The Green Dream* of 1974 (Cat. No. 7) at once suggests a subconscious state, for the fantastic images, unattached to any concrete ground, float to the surface in a vibrant, luminous atmosphere. The large, green mask-like face peers from the

work as if to catch the viewer's eyes with its own. Appel was especially influenced by childlike imagery, yet the fantasy aspect of the myth is evident in his works. The bronze creature (Cat. No. 15) is the epitome of pure imagination. This fantastic beast is composed of three legs, a bird-like head, two wings, and a tail. The whole of the bronzed surface is textured as if the creature had just taken shape from clay, and was now ready for flight.

Elements of the Grotesque

Within the imagery of CoBrA lurks an element of horror and violence. Dubuffet, whose works paralleled CoBrA, saw man as basically "violent, violated, distorted, and agonized," sentiments often communicated by the CoBrA artists. Through the artists' imagination, simple, once pure images became defiled and deformed. In their quest for emotional truth, CoBrA reacted against its perception of the absurdity of the human condition, for it represented one important aspect of the unconscious. Consequently, the images often represent a debauched caricature of the world. The human figures or mythical forms often appear hallucinogenic, as reality is transformed by subconscious forces.

De Man van Tollund by Vandercam of 1963 (Cat. No. 33), exemplifies the awesome qualities inherent in some of the CoBrA works. The figure emerges from the black ground in brilliant colors of red and orange. Cascading from the top of its head the colors all blend together, having been applied with sweeping, downward strokes. These give the impression that the figure is melting into the white of the canvas below, as if it were a red sea of beeswax. A feeling of uneasiness is ex-



Jean Dubuffet, *Tete au chapeau*, 1960

perienced by the viewer. A similar reaction is felt upon viewing *Still Life with Skulls* (1961), by Lucebert (Cat. No. 19). It is an example of distorted form combined with grotesque coloration to create a terrifying composition. The skulls emerge ghost-like from the heavily painted ground. The pigment was applied in slashing strokes of superimposed color, creating a morbid slush of green and purple. The forms appear and disappear before the eyes communicating mystery and dread.

Dubuffet was a puppeteer and made masks of various materials from his own face and faces of others, for he saw a close relationship between man and his mask, or the real and the grotesque. Thus, the impact of his images is due in part to the mixture of familiarity and terror. In *Tête au chapeau* of 1960 (Cat. No. 26), the figure is drawn with wavy lines giving it a fluid character, and the features of the large face are replaced by dribbles of

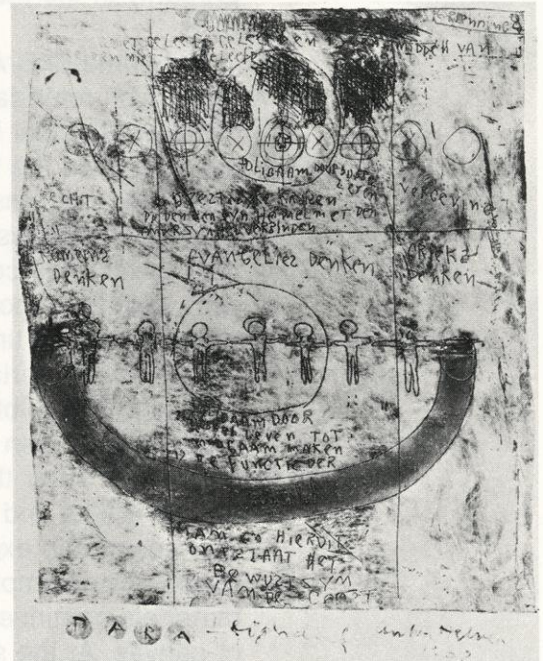
ink and scratches on the paper. The effect is disturbing. One is forced to stare at the stark, faceless being whose humanity seems to have been stripped away.

The figures and forms in the work of CoBrA are often expressive of man's intrinsic terror. By virtue of their immediacy the images convey primal emotions. The viewer is caught unaware when images inspired by the innocent repertory of children's art take on demonic characteristics, or cruel and violent aspects. The genius of CoBrA may thus be seen as lying in its unique distortion of familiar images.

Peinture-Mots

The power of the image as an expressive tool of free imagination is a primary characteristic of the art of CoBrA. In this it has affinities with the "automatism," practiced by the Surrealists. In CoBrA, this idea gave rise to innovative collaborations between literary and pictorial artists. Members of CoBrA, especially from the Belgian sector, had a special interest in the "magical powers" of language. Symbols in language facilitated communication in a seemingly spontaneous "magical" way, and represented yet another free route of expression. It was felt that handwriting is drawing and that drawing is handwriting, in the manner of Chinese calligraphy. The collaboration between artist, writer and poet was seen as forming a union of creative forces. From this union, the term *peinture-mots* emerged. The collaborations of Jorn and Dotremont are the most celebrated of this type of work in CoBrA. At the same time *peinture-mots* by a single individual also resulted from the visual expression which the poet felt, or the poetic urge which a painter felt.

The etching *Para* (1962), by Anton Heyboer (Cat. No. 30) is a good example of the *peinture-mots* by one artist. Like graffiti the crude letters spread over the surface of this print in counterpoint to the figurative caricatures. The linear quality of the image holds the symbols together in the composition, and the effect of this work is reminiscent of the hieroglyphics of primitive cultures.



Anton Heyboer, *Para*, 1962

Experimentation: Techniques and Materials

The spontaneity of expression within CoBrA, not limited to symbols alone, was evident in the techniques and materials incorporated in their work. Whether working in conventional oil paints or more extemporaneous modes such as collage utilizing wads of paste and newspaper scraps, the artists produced works which fully exploited their materials. Materials were used to complement and unite with the image to create a unified form in which neither

the medium nor the image was exclusive. The medium itself became an expressive force rather than a mere tool with which to produce an artistic image. Exploitation of materials was a pure form of creativity originating within the artist and thus represented his personal style. A description of Jorn's work noted, "his signs are locked in the material, an image even connected to other works by him exists primarily in the material that embodies it."¹⁹

For some CoBrA artists, experimentation with materials was at first dictated by financial impoverishment. Appel described the first studio which he, Corneille and Constant shared in Paris. It was a storehouse across from a tannery which they converted to a studio with what little money they had. Appel recalls, "at that time I used thin liquids as painting material, also varnish, no money to buy a lot of paints. And jute was cheaper than canvas, so jute it was. . . ."²⁰ After they gained recognition as artists and their financial plight was eased, the experimentation continued. For example, burlap and other materials continued to be used instead of canvas. At the same time the artists were able to experiment with textures of paint as they had not been able to do previously.

The *Clown* (Cat. No. 11) by Appel is a work in which the texture of the paint is celebrated by the artist. The painting was done on burlap and paint was applied in many layers. The individual strokes are essentially three-dimensional, giving a sculptural quality to this extremely powerful image which appears to intrude into the viewer's space.

In general the group was fascinated by the inherent qualities of oil paint, whether alone or in combination with other materials, to create textures. *Couleur de plomb* by Wagemaker of 1958 (Cat. No. 34), a large oil collage, in varying tones of greys and blacks, plays off contrasting textures and surfaces. The materials Wagemaker utilizes under the paint emerge as a unique kind of imagery. He is fully tempting the tactile senses of the viewer. In *Noir chargé* (Cat. No. 18) by Ger Lataster (1963), the technique of finger painting is employed, a direct manipulation of paint frequently used by other CoBrA artists. The work represents a burst of spontaneous expression from which no specific forms emerge.

The symbolism of CoBrA embodies a personal, mythical, and fantastical language. The simple forms which were employed attempted to break from established forms of expression and create a new vocabulary for inner feelings as well as the communication of basic human experience. CoBrA artists wished for a completely spontaneous art from which they could draw something different each time they viewed it. They visualized their art as unrooted either in time or in specific artistic cultures; freely conceived, it was universal. The familiar was transformed into a new system of values. CoBrA art was to be a new folk art which honored the creative, imaginative forces of every man. As Dore Ashton has written, "Writing, drawing, spinning out spontaneous responses was seen as a process, a living tracing of the ceaseless activity of the imagination."²¹

E.B., W.A., M.M., G.M., R.Z.

Footnotes

¹George H. Hamilton, *Painting and Sculpture in Europe, 1880-1940* (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1978), p. 198.

²Hamilton, p. 217.

³Oscar G. Brockett and Robert R. Findley, *Century of Innovation: A History of European and American Theatre and Drama Since 1870* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1973), pp. 289-96.

⁴André Breton, "First Surrealist Manifesto," in *Avant-Garde Drama*, ed. Bernard F. Dukore and Daniel C. Gerould (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976), pp. 570-71.

⁵Hamilton, p. 499.

⁶Robert Welsh, "Dutch Painting and the CoBra Group," *Canadian Art*, May, 1963, p. 161.

⁷Welsh, p. 161.

⁸Hamilton, p. 327.

⁹Welsh, p. 161.

¹⁰Emile Langui, "Expressionism Since 1945 and the Cobra Movement," in *Art Since Mid-Century: The New Internationalism* (Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1971), II, p. 63.

¹¹Appel in *Contemporary Artists* (New York, 1977); Jorn in "Cobra in Context," by Dore Ashton, *Arts Magazine*, 2 (Feb., 1978), p. 108; Constant, in Ashton, p. 108; Rooskens in *Contemporary Artists*; Jorn in Ashton, p. 102.

¹²Ashton, p. 106.

¹³Selz, p. 60.

¹⁴Ashton, p. 108.

¹⁵Ashton, p. 108.

¹⁶Hugo Claus, *Karel Appel, Painter* (Amsterdam: A.J.G. Strengtholt, 1962), p. 69.

¹⁷Claus, p. 73.

¹⁸Pierre Alechinsky, *Paintings and Writings* (Paris: Yves Rivière Arts et Metiers Graphiques), p. 12.

¹⁹Lawrence Alloway, *Jorn* (New York: Lefebvre Gallery, 1967), n.p.

²⁰Claus, p. 51.

²¹Ashton, p. 109.

Additional Sources:

Albjerg, Victor and Marguerite Hall. *Europe from 1914 to the Present*. New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, Inc., 1951.

Bordwell, David, et. al. *Film Art: An Introduction*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1970.

Colton, Joel G. *Twentieth Century*. New York: Time-Life Books, 1968.

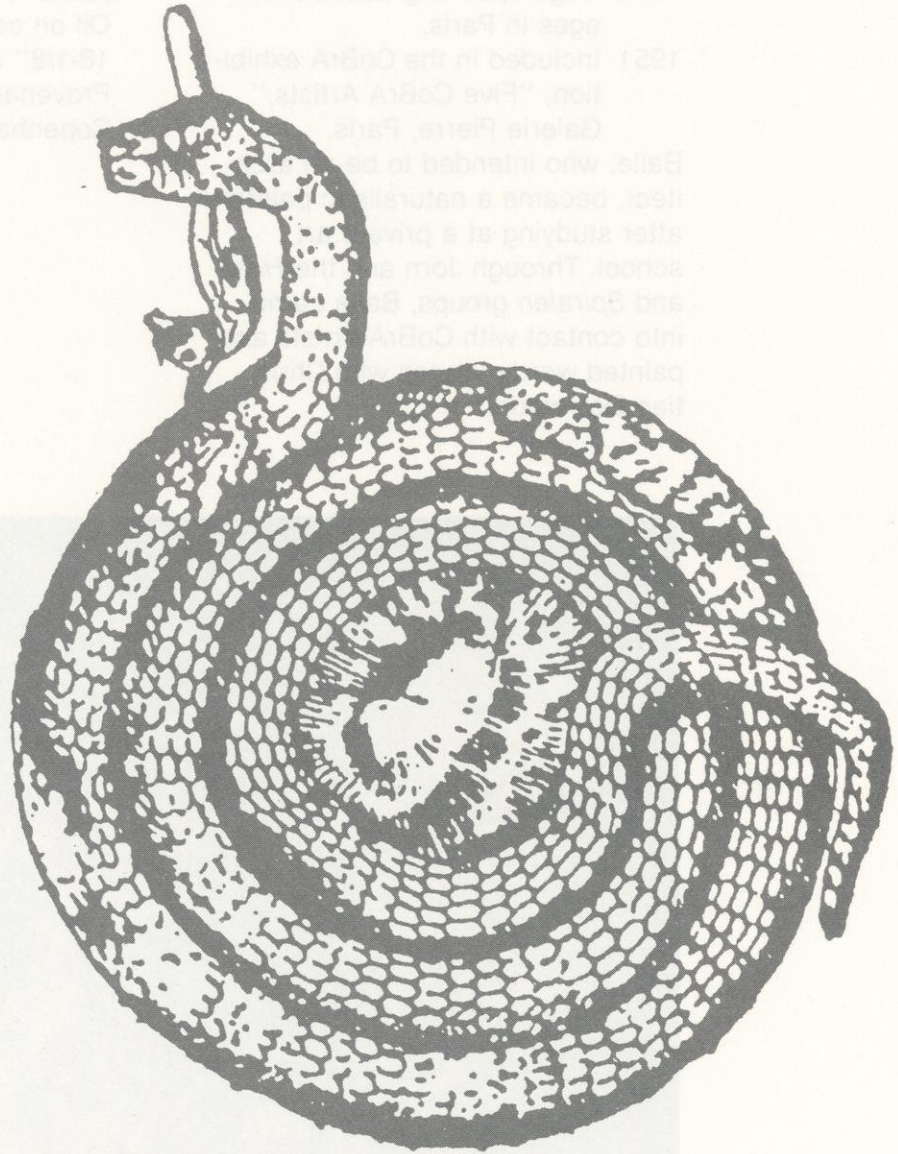
Mosse, George L. *The Culture of Western Europe*. Chicago: Rand McNally, 1974.

Stokvis, Willemijn L. *Cobra. Geschiedenis, voorspel en betekenis van een beweging in de kunst van na de tweede wereldoorlog*. Diss. Rijksuniversiteit te Utrecht, 1973. (Includes a summary in English.)

CoBrA Artists

- Pierre Alechinsky
- Else Alfelt
- Karel Appel
- Jean-Michel Atlan
- Mogens Balle
- Ejler Christian Torbensen Bille
- Eugene Brands
- Pol Bury
- Hugo Claus
- Constant Nieuwenhuys
- Corneille van Beverloo
- Jan Cox
- Christian Dotremont
- Jacques Doucet
- Sonja Ferlov-Mancoba
- Stephen Gilbert
- Karl Otto Gotz
- Svavar Gudnason
- Henry Heerup
- Egill Jacobsen
- Asger Jorn
- Ger Lataster
- Louis van Lint
- Lucebert
- Jan Nieuwenhuys
- Joseph Noiret
- Erick Ortvad
- Anders Osterlin
- Carl-Henning Pedersen
- Anton Rooskens
- Shinkichi Tajiri
- Erik Thommesen
- Rodolphe Raoul Ubac
- Theo Wolvecamp
- *Artists represented in the exhibition*

The Collection



Danish CoBrA Artists

Mogens Balle

Born 1921, in Denmark.

1946 Began painting abstract images in Paris.

1951 Included in the CoBrA exhibition, "Five CoBrA Artists," Galerie Pierre, Paris.

Balle, who intended to be an architect, became a naturalistic painter after studying at a private art school. Through Jorn and the *Host* and *Spiralen* groups, Balle came into contact with CoBrA artists and painted word-pictures with Christian Dotremont.

1. *Brev fra en ven*
(*Letter from a Friend*)

Oil on canvas

18-1/8" x 21-3/4"

Provenance: Courts Gallery,
Copenhagen



Asger Jorn (Asgar Oluf Jorgensen)

- Born 1914, in Vejrum, Denmark.
Died 1973, in Silkeborg, Denmark.
- 1930-35 Taught in Silkeborg.
- 1934 Studied with Martin Kaaland-Jorgensen.
- 1936-37 Studied at the Academie Contemporaine, with Fernand Léger, in Paris. Became a member of the Linien group and returned to Denmark.
- 1938-40 Studied at the Art Academy, Copenhagen.
- 1941 Co-founded *Helhesten* magazine.
- 1947 Worked on tapestries in France with Pierre Vamaere. Met Christian Dotremont in Paris and co-founded the *Bureau International de Surrealisme Revolutionnaire*.
- 1948 Co-founded CoBrA group, Paris.
- 1949-50 Lived in Humlebaek, Denmark.
- 1950-51 Lived in Paris.
- 1951-53 Contracted tuberculosis and worked on paintings and ceramics during convalescence in Silkeborg.
- 1953-57 Member of the *Mouvement pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste* in Switzerland and of the *Situationistes Internationales* in Paris.
- 1954-73 Lived in Albissota, Italy and in Paris.
- 1961 Produced experimental films with Albert Mertz and Guy Debord in Munich.

-
2. *Personnage*, 1958
(*Personage*)
Oil on canvas
18-7/8" x 15-1/16"
Provenance: Galleria d'Arte del
Cavallino, Venice
Exhibitions:
Elvehjem Art Center Inaugural Ex-
hibition, 1970



3. *Fjols i fare*, 1964
(*Fool in Danger*)
Drypoint (Edition 10/15)
5-7/16" x 5-3/16"



4. *Conférence à 7*, 1953
(*Lecture at 7*)
Etching (Edition 2/15)
3'' x 4''



5. *Patriotic Indigestion*, 1966
Acrylic on paper on canvas
16'' x 12-15/16''
Provenance: Lefebre Gallery, New
York



Carl-Henning Pedersen

Born 1913, in Copenhagen, Denmark.

1940-49 Member of *Helhesten* (the Horse of Hell), an association of Danish abstract artists.

1948-51 Member of CoBrA.

1958 Danish Guggenheim Prize-winner.

1962 Represented at the Biennale in Venice.

Originally a self-taught abstract artist, Pedersen was influenced by the linear styles of Klee and Miro. From this beginning, his work evolved into the Nordic expressionism of his CoBrA imagery.

6. *Windmill*, 1974

Watercolor on paper
30-3/8" x 22"

Provenance: Lefebre Gallery, New York



7. *The Green Dream*, 1974

Watercolor on paper

22-3/8" x 29-3/4"

Provenance: Lefebvre Gallery,
New York



Belgian CoBrA Artists

Pierre Alechinsky

Born 1927, in Brussels, Belgium.

1944-48 Studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture at des Arts Decoratifs, Brussels.

1947 Joined the group *Jeune Peinture Belge*.

1951 Worked in Atelier 17 with Stanley William Hayter in Paris.

1953 Joined the October Salon Committee.

1975 Given permanent exhibition space at the Louisiana Museum, Humlebaek, Denmark.

Trained as a book illustrator, Alechinsky became involved with the Surrealist movement through Max Ernst. He later joined CoBrA, incorporating in his work that group's most common imagery: strange beasts, people and flowers.

8. *Le Gastronom*, 1962
(*The Gastronomist*)
Watercolor on paper mounted on
board prepared with gesso, with
lacquer coating
37" x 28-1/4"

Provenance: Lefebvre Gallery, New York
Exhibitions: The Arts Club of
Chicago Exhibition; Jewish
Museum, New York; Walker Art
Center, Minneapolis; Elvehjem Art
Center Inaugural Exhibition, 1970.



9. *C'est pas possible*, 1965
(*It's Not Possible*)
Oil on canvas
25-3/8" x 21-1/8"
Provenance: Galerie Espace,
Amsterdam



Corneille (Cornelius Guillaume van Beverloo)

- Born 1922, in Liege, Belgium.
- 1940-43 Studied drawing at the Rijksacademie, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.
- 1948 Co-founded CoBrA.
- 1953 Moved to Paris where he studied etching at Atelier 17 with Stanley William Hayter.
- 1961-66 Lived in Mallorca and Cadaques, Spain.
10. *Vol d'Oiseaux dans un paysage*, 1960
Oil on canvas
36-1/8" x 23-1/2"
Provenance: Lefebvre Gallery, New York
Exhibitions: Elvehjem Art Center Inaugural Exhibition, 1970.



Dutch CoBrA Artists

Karel Appel

Born 1925, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

1940-43 Studied at the Rijks-academie, Amsterdam.

1946 Met Corneille, Louis Van Lint, and Marc Mendekin.

1948 Co-founded the Dutch Experimental group, which published "Reflex," and later that year became a part of CoBrA.

1950 Moved to Paris.

Currently lives and works in New York.

11. *Clown*, 1954

Oil on burlap

40-5/8" x 35-1/8"

Provenance: Galleries Stadler, Paris

Exhibitions: Elvehjem Art Center Inaugural Exhibition, 1970.



12. *Personage with Parrot*, 1960

Oil on canvas

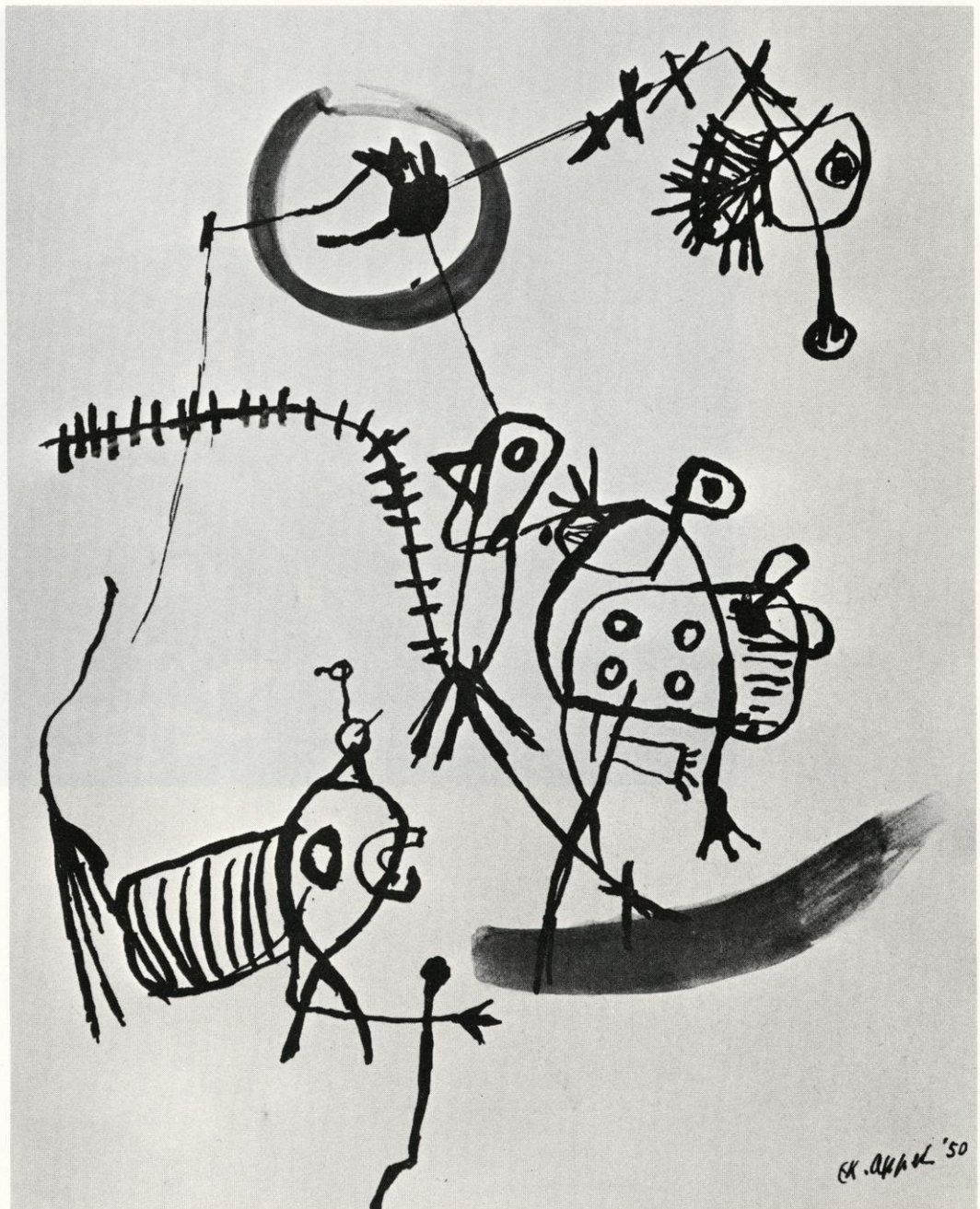
35" x 45-1/2"

Provenance: Martha Jackson

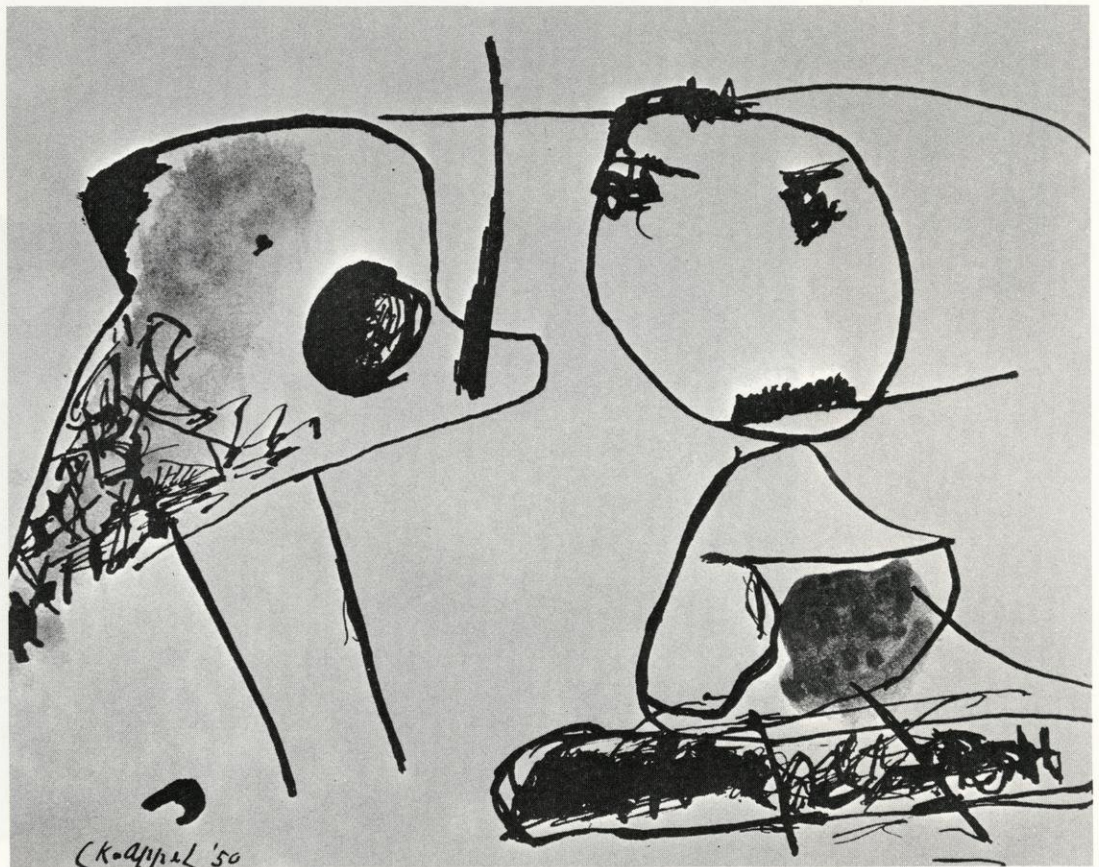
Gallery, New York.



13. Untitled, 1950
Planographic print and gouache
10-11/16'' x 8-5/16''
Provenance: Galerie Kriekhaar,
Amsterdam.



14. Untitled, 1950
Planographic print and gouache
8-3/8'' x 10-3/4''
Provenance: Galerie Kriekhaar,
Amsterdam



15. Untitled, 1950
Bronze
17-1/2" H.



Eugene Brands

Born 1913, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

1931-34 Studied at the Academy of Applied Arts, Amsterdam.

1948 Member of the Dutch Experimental group which published "Reflex," and later that year became a part of CoBrA.

1949 Left CoBrA after scandal at the CoBrA exhibition opening at the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, but has continued to explore CoBrA ideas and currently lives and works in Amsterdam.

16. *Demon of Shipwrecks*, 1951

Oil on canvas

39-3/8" x 23-3/8"

Provenance: Court Gallerie, Copenhagen.



Constant (Constant A. Nieuwenhuys)

Born 1920, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Studied at the Rijksacademie, Amsterdam.

1945 Painted his first experimental pictures.

1948 Member of the Dutch Experimental group which published "Reflex," and later that year became a part of CoBrA.

1952 His interest started to shift from painting to spatial and architectural problems.

1953 Made his first sculptural constructions.

1956 Has been working on his urban project, "New Babylon," lives and works in Amsterdam.

17. Untitled, 1949

Gouache and crayon on paper
18-3/4" x 19-3/8"

Provenance: Venice Biennale



Ger Lataster

Born 1920, in Schaesberg, Province of Limburg, the Netherlands. Studied at the School of Arts and Crafts, of Maastricht and the Rijks-academie in Amsterdam. 1949-50 Member of CoBrA. Currently lives and works in Paris.

18. *Noir chargé*, 1963

(*Loaded Black*)

Oil on canvas

31-1/2" x 50-3/4"

Provenance: Galérié Paul Facchetti, Paris.



Lucebert (Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk)

Born 1924, in Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

1938 Studied at the School of Arts and Crafts, Amsterdam.

1948 Member of the Dutch Experimental group which published "Reflex," and later that year became a part of CoBrA.

1955 Visited Berthold Brecht in East Berlin.

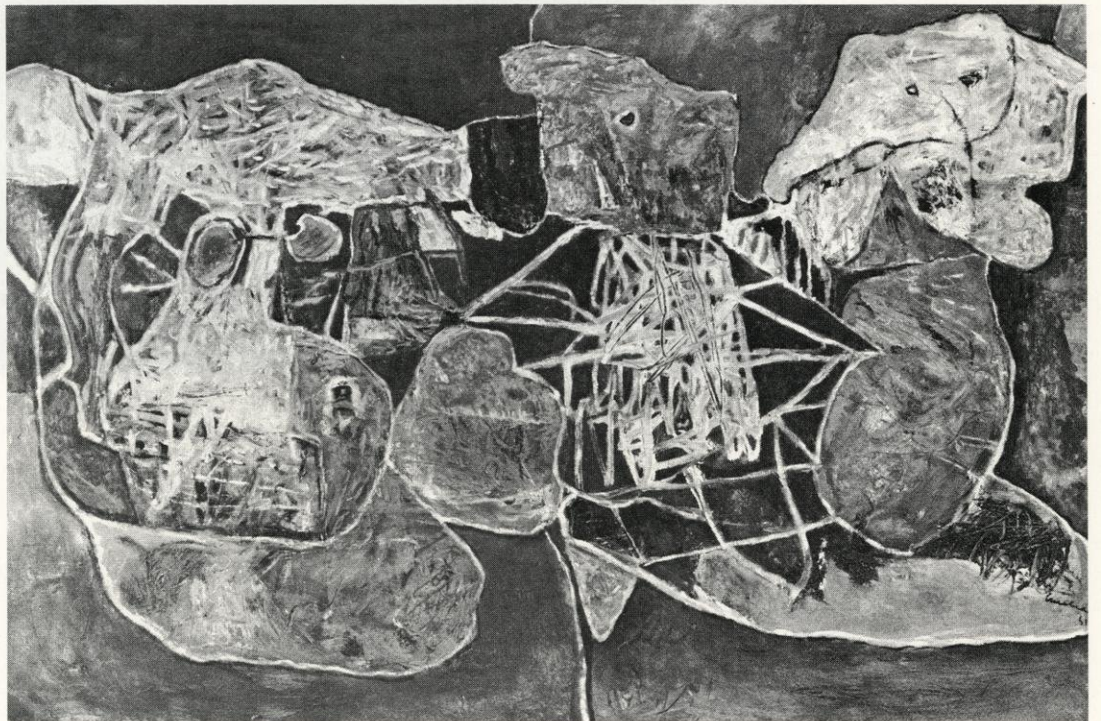
Currently lives and works in Bergen, the Netherlands. Lucebert is one of Holland's best known poets. Most of his drawings reflect his adherence to the CoBrA tradition.

19. *Still Life with Skulls*, 1961

Oil on canvas

39-1/4" x 58-7/8"

Provenance: Galerie Espace, Amsterdam.



Anton Rooskens

Born 1906, in Grindtsveen, the Netherlands. Died 1976, in Amsterdam. Studied electrotechnology and worked as electronic engineer.

1934 Began to paint.

1946 Exhibited with four members of the future CoBrA group at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam.

1948 Member of the Dutch Experimental group which published "Reflex," and later that year became a part of CoBrA.

1954 Made his first stage designs in Amsterdam.

20. *Vogelman*, 1949

(*Birdman*)

Oil on canvas

41-1/4" x 45-3/4"

Exhibitions: First CoBrA exhibition, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1949.



21. *Figures*, 1967
Crayon and wash on paper
10-3/8" x 9"



Theo Wolvecamp

Born 1925, in Hengelo, the Netherlands.

1945-47 Studied at the Academy of Arnheim.

1947 Moved to Amsterdam.

1948 Member of the Dutch Experimental Group which published "Reflex," and later that year became a part of CoBrA.

1953-54 Lived in Paris.

1954 Returned to Hengelo.

Wolvecamp's artistic development parallels that of Asger Jorn and Karel Appel. His compositions demonstrate a magical symbolism characterized by circles, spirals and explosions of whirling lines.

22. 13 A, 1968

Oil on canvas

15-7/8" x 19-3/4"



Tajiri (Shinkichi Tajiri)

Born 1923, in Los Angeles, California.

1947-49 Studied at the Art Institute of Chicago, Illinois.

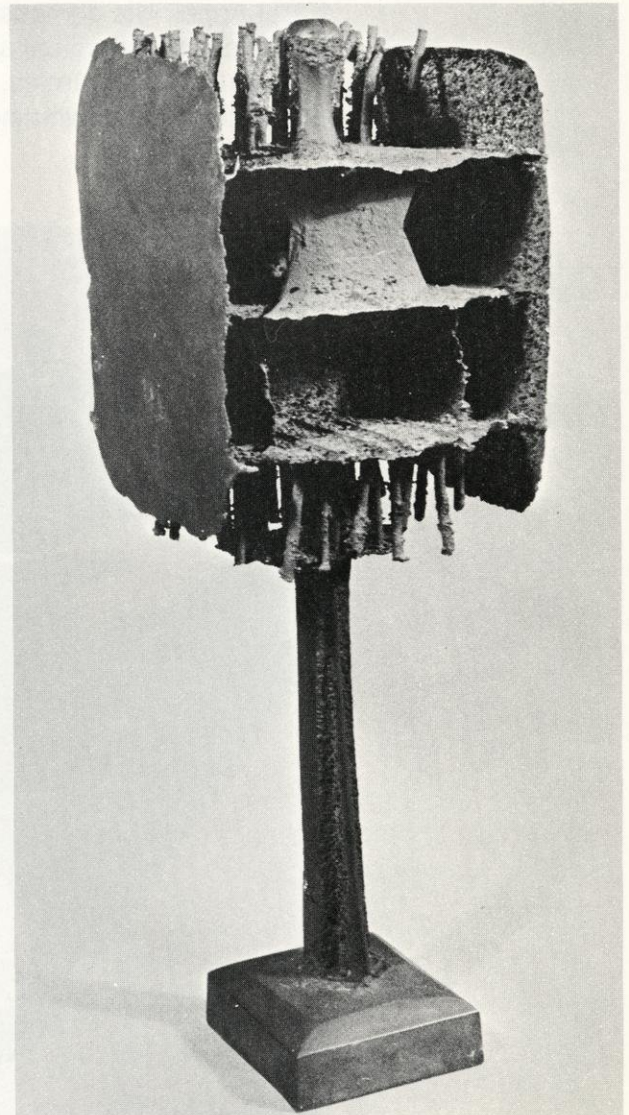
1950 Left the U.S.A., in protest of the treatment of Japanese-Americans during the war. In Paris, studied with Zadkine and Léger, and associated with the artists of the CoBrA group. He also co-founded Galerie 8, Paris.

1952 Designer for Rasch Wallpaper, Bramsche, West Germany.

1956 Moved to Amsterdam.

1969 Professor of Fine Art, Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Kunst, West Berlin.

23. Untitled
Bronze
21-3/4" H.



Non-CoBrA Artists

Jet Diereren

Born 1920, in Heelen, the Netherlands.

1947 Studied at the Academy of Maastricht.

1957 First one-man show which demonstrated that he was influenced by Cubism and found inspiration for his abstractions in his environment.

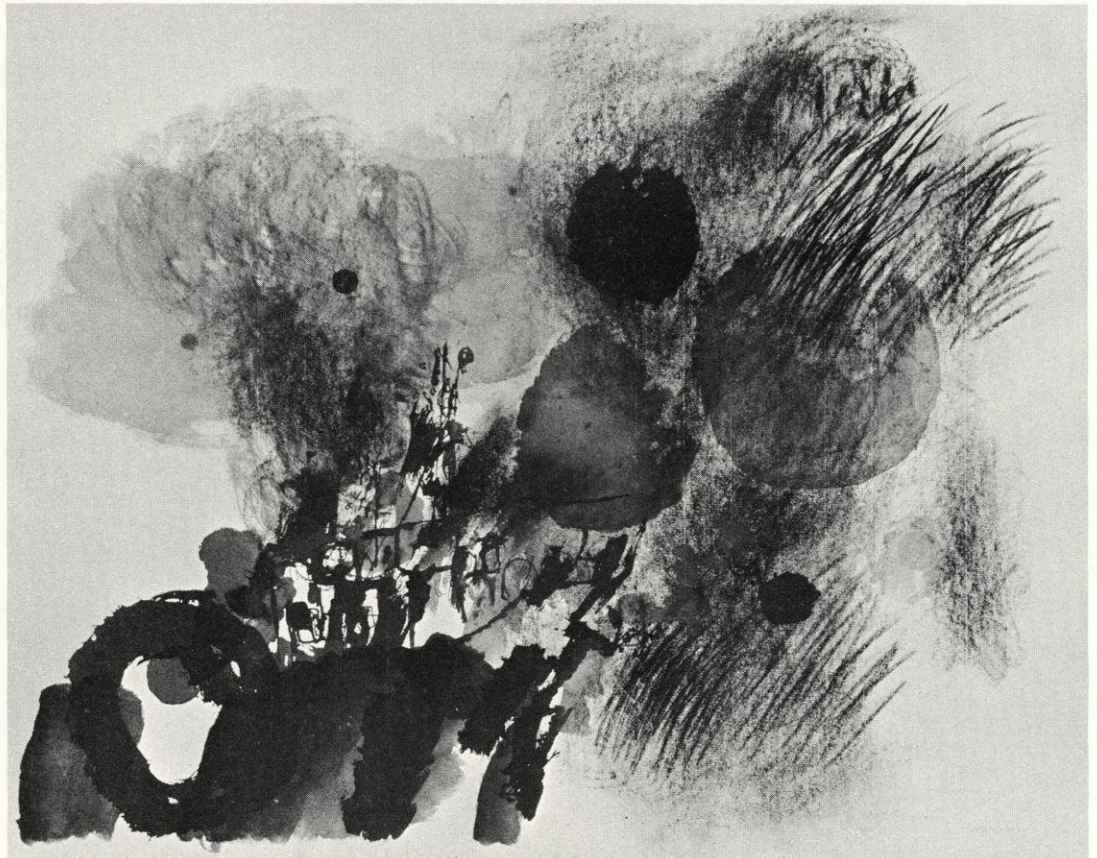
24. *Monte Cassino*, 1960

Charcoal and watercolor on laid paper

19-1/4" x 23-1/2"

Provenance: Galerie Espace, Amsterdam.

Elvehjem Museum of Art, 1979-1107
(Gift of Dr. and Mrs. Alexander Hollaender)



Jean Dubuffet

- Born 1901, in Le Havre, France.
- 1918 Studied at Academie Julian, Paris. Associated with Valadon, Dufy, Jacob, Cingria and Léger, in Paris.
- 1925 Returned to Le Havre where he entered the family wine business.
- 1933-37 Started painting again and by 1942 devoted himself entirely to his art.
- 1947 Founded the *Société de l'Art Brut*, Paris
- 1951-52 Lived and worked in New York.
- 1955-61 Lived and worked in Vence, France.
- 1960 Produced his first experimental musical works with Asger Jorn in Paris.
- 1967 Made his first architectural environments, and in 1971 began designing theatrical decors. Currently lives and works in Paris and Perigny, France.

25. *Végétation*, 1953

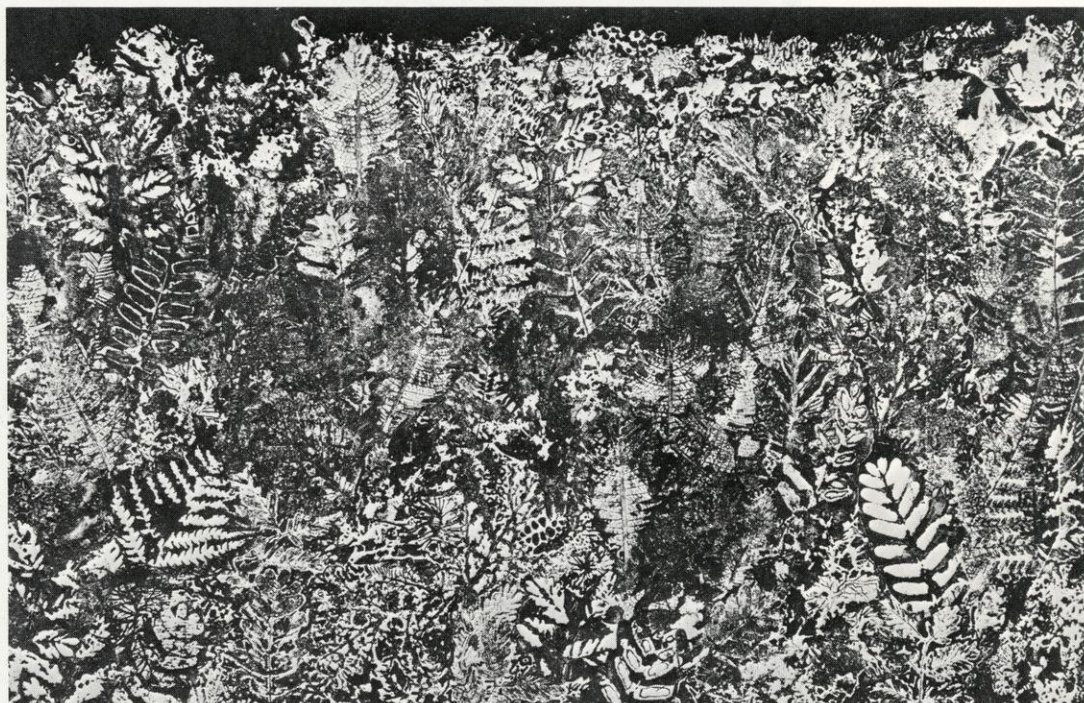
(*Vegetation*)

Lithograph (Edition 1/20)

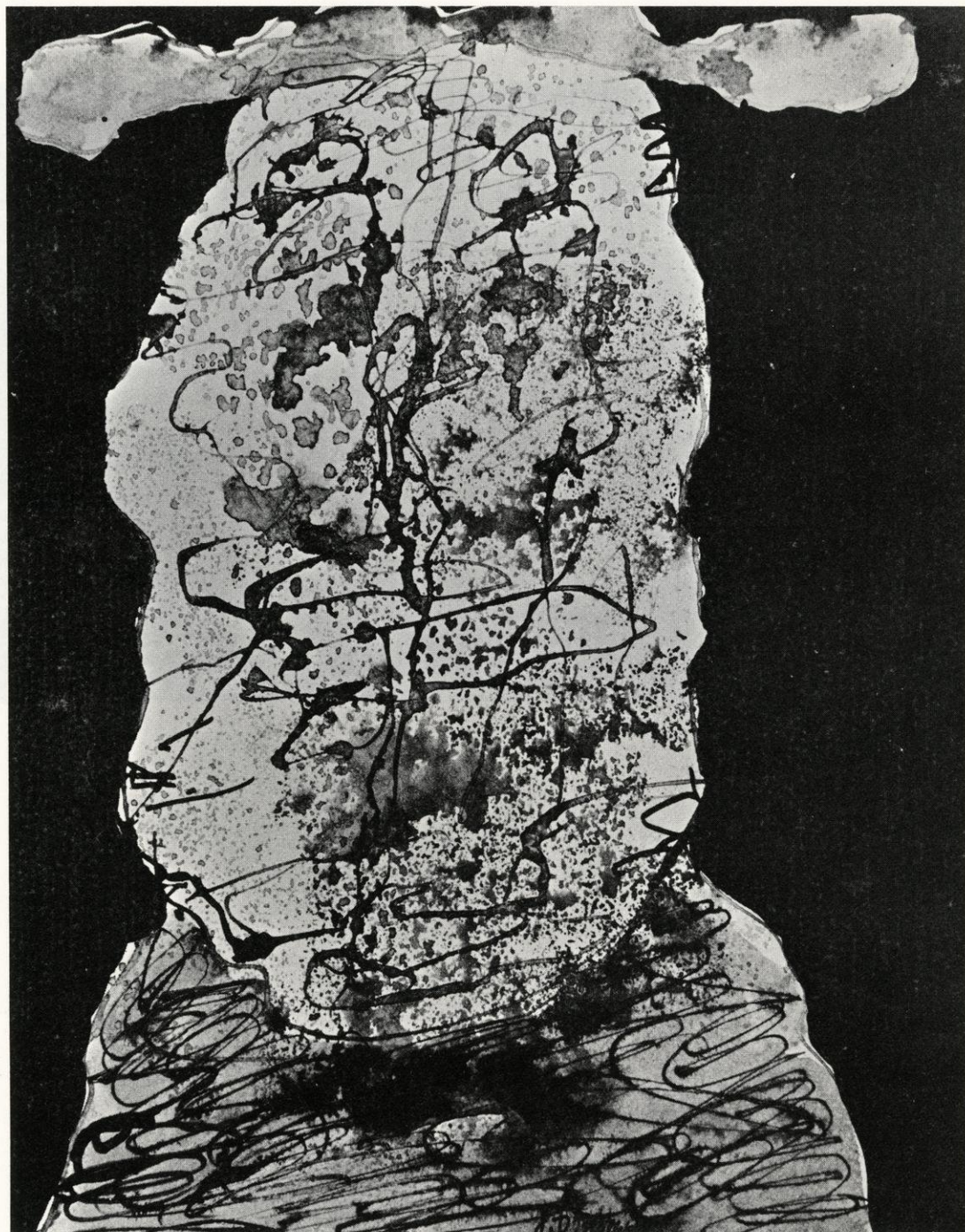
13-1/2" x 20-1/2"

Provenance: La Hune Gallery, Paris

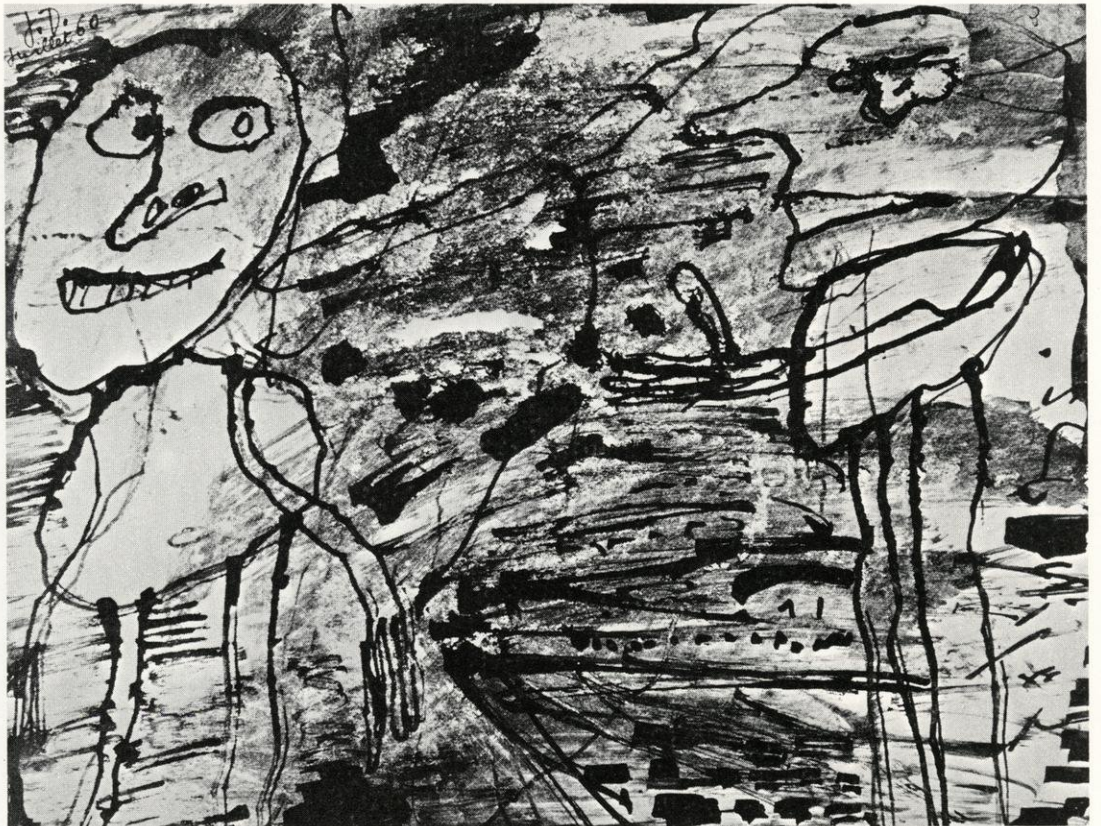
Exhibition: Philadelphia Museum of Art.



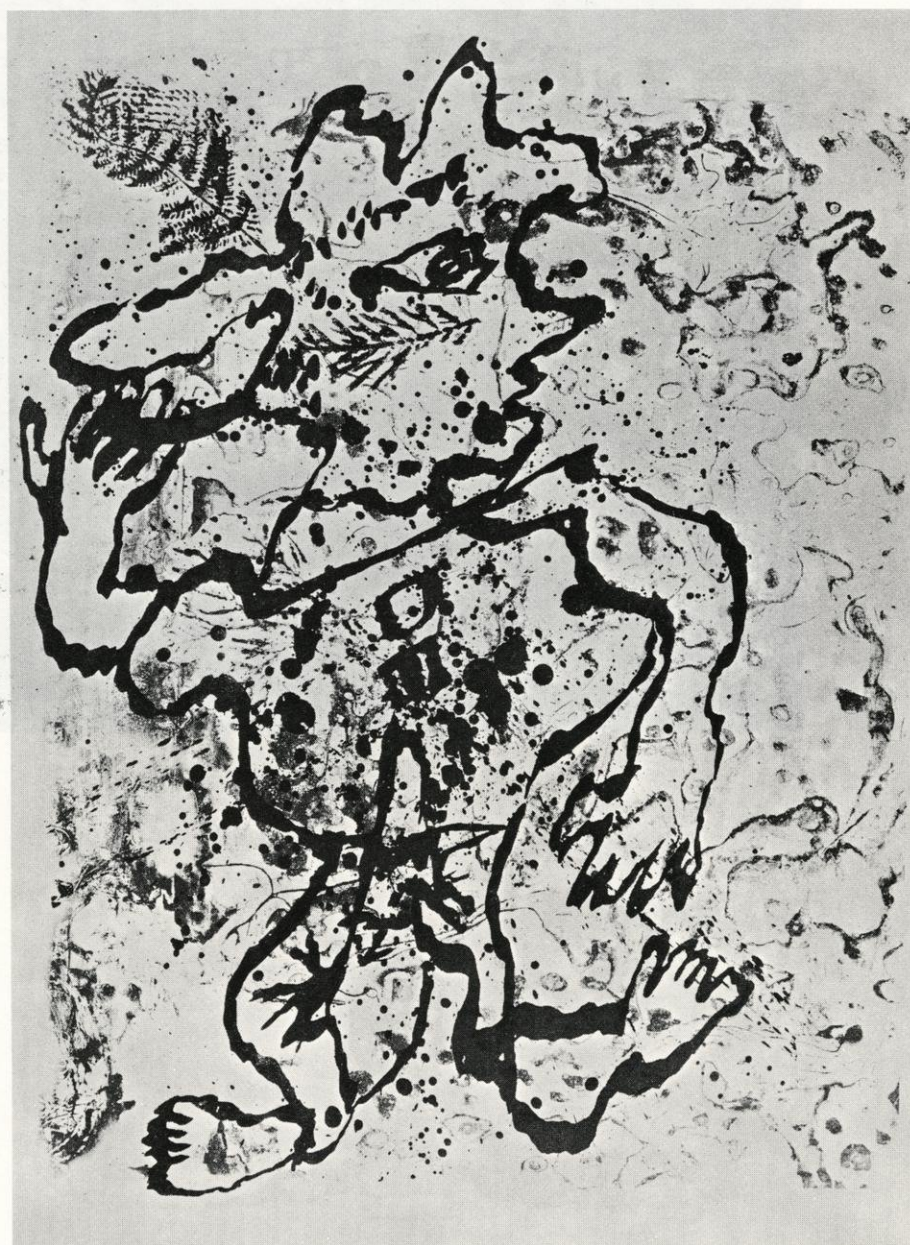
26. *Tête au chapeau*, 1960
(*Head with Hat*)
Ink and wash on paper
1.1-11/16" x 9-1/4"



27. *Deux Personnages et paysage*,
1960
(*Two People and Landscape*)
Ink and wash on paper
9-1/8" x 12"



28. *Fougère au chapeau*
(*Hat with Fern*)
Three-color lithograph (Edition
21/60)
20-5/8" x 16"
Exhibitions: Philadelphia Museum
of Art, 1964;
Elvehjem Art Center, 1974.



Roelof Frankot

Born 1911, in Meppel, the Netherlands.

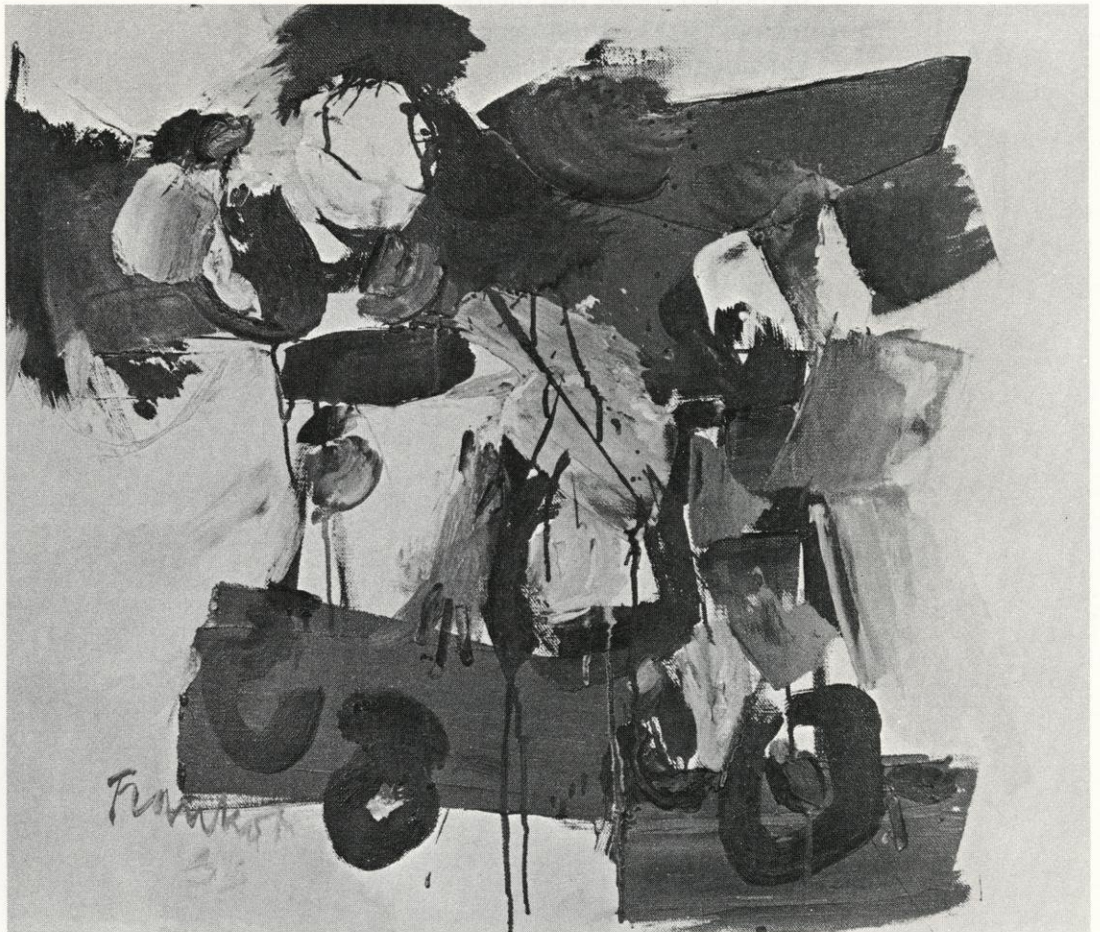
1953 Began painting and joined the Ecole de Paris. Beginning as a photographer, Frankot drew upon post-cubism, incorporating non-significant materials in his painted compositions.

29. Untitled, 1963

Oil on canvas

23-1/2" x 27-1/2"

Provenance: Galerie Espace, Amsterdam.



Anton Heyboer

Born 1924, in Sabang, Indonesia,
of Dutch parentage.

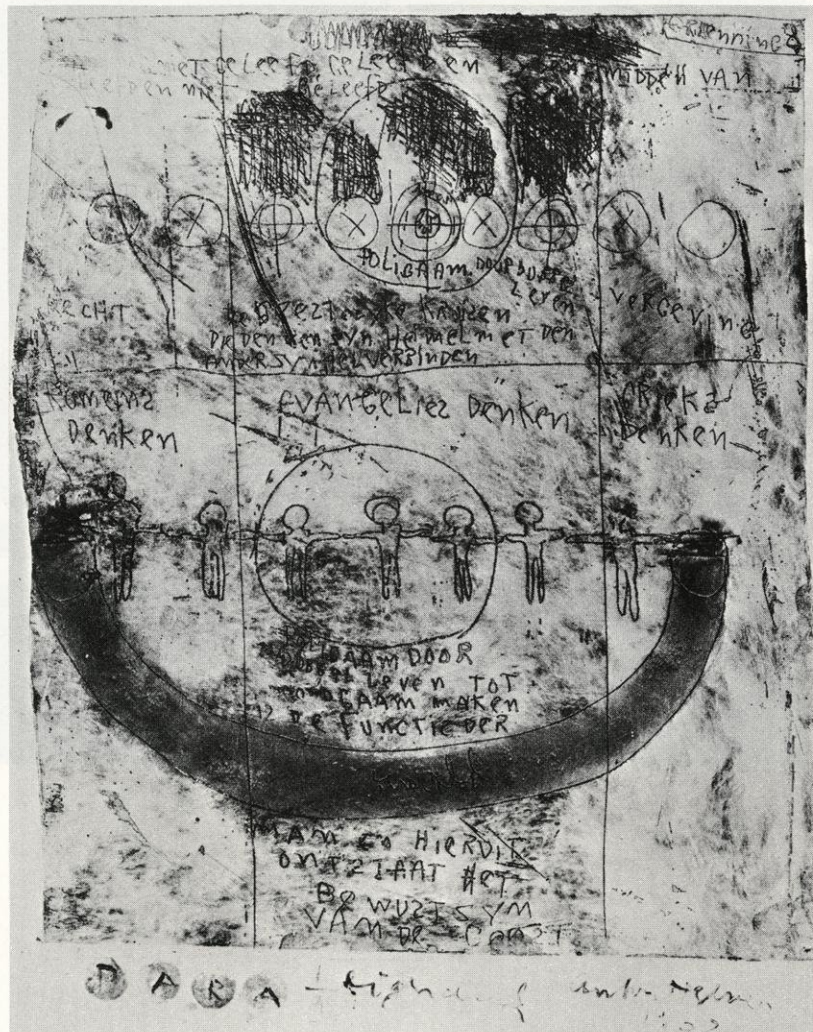
1957 First one-man show,
Haarlem.

1958 One-man show at the
Stedelijk Museum, Amster-
dam.

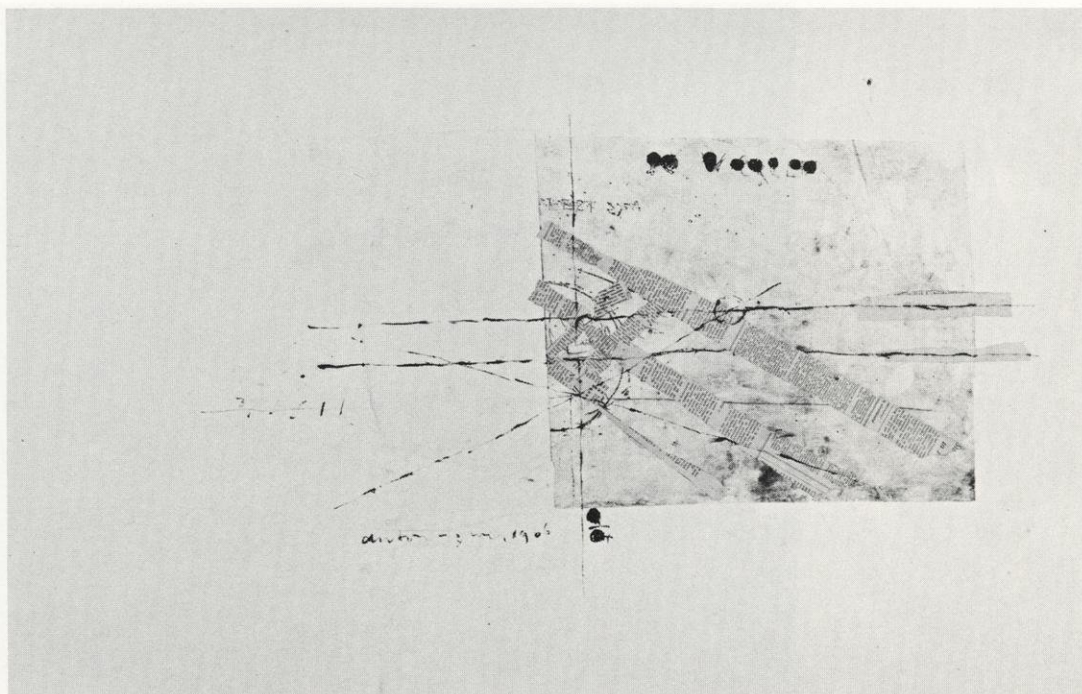
Though not a member of CoBrA,
Heyboer was strongly influenced
by word-pictures and the CoBrA ar-
tists' use of childlike imagery. He
combined these two elements in
his own work, developing a highly
individual pictorial style.

30. *Para*, 1962

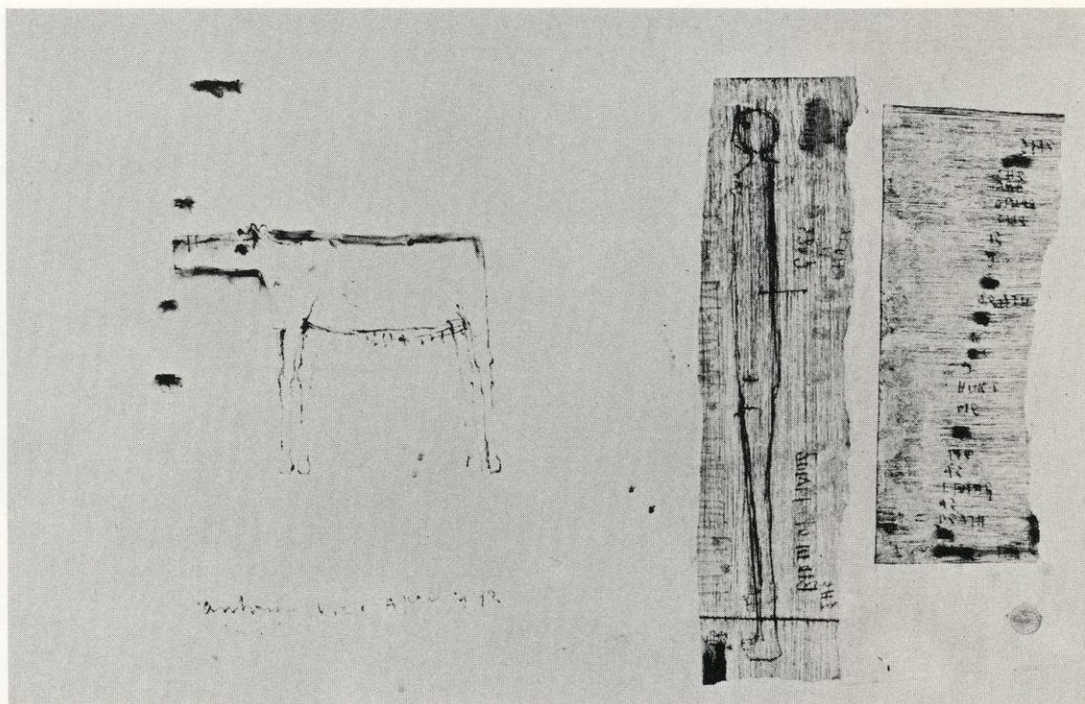
Mixed intaglio (Edition 1/9)
20" x 17"



31. Untitled, 1966
Intaglio, collage and ink drawing
25-1/4" x 39-3/4"



32. Untitled, 1972
Intaglio, collage and ink drawing
25" x 39-5/8"



Serge Vandercam

Born 1924, in Copenhagen, Denmark.

Currently lives and works in Bierges Lez-Wavre.

(specific chronology unavailable)

Before he began to paint, Vandercam, a self-taught artist, developed his own abstract imagery through photography. Though of the CoBrA generation and influenced particularly by Alechinsky, he was not a member of CoBrA.

33. *De Man van Tollund*, 1963

(*The Man from Tollund*)

Oil on canvas

41-3/8'' x 19''

Provenance: Galerie Delta, Rotterdam.



Jaap Wagemaker

Born 1906 in Haarlem, the Netherlands. Died in 1972.

1945 Studied at the School of Arts and Crafts, Haarlem and settled in Amsterdam that same year.

1960 Received a Guggenheim Foundation Award, New York. To the CoBrA imagery Wagemaker joins Dutch earthiness, northern paganism and an instinctive mysticism.

34. *Couleur de plomb*, 1958
(*Colour of Lead*)

Oil and collage on canvas
59" x 41-3/4"

Provenance: Graham Gallery, New York

Exhibitions: Carnegie Institute, 1961.



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