

Rustende Kikker

screenprint

1978

43 x 63 cm

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Karel Appel

Karel Appel met Corneille in the period 1940-1943 while studying art at Amsterdam's prestigious Rijksacademie. In 1946 the two travelled to Liège, where they mounted a joint exhibition in 1947. Appel and Corneille also journeyed to Paris together. On Appel's return he met Constant and in 1948 he, Constant and Corneille exhibited in Amsterdam.

Together with Anton Rooskens, Theo Wolvecamp and Jan Nieuwenhuys (Constant's brother) the three went on to form the Dutch Experimental Group on 16 July 1948. On 8 November of that same year Appel helped found CoBrA, and is probably the movement's best-known member in the Netherlands.

Above all, Karel Appel is famous for describing his work as 'just mucking about' – which didn't endear him to other painters in the expressive style. He created a furore in the Dutch art world of the Forties and Fifties, his 1949 mural Questioning children for the staff restaurant in Amsterdam's city hall occasioning quite a scandal. Indignant civil servants, rendered uncomfortable by the starving children's beseeching eyes, insisted the work be covered up and the mural disappeared behind wallpaper for a decade.

Appel always favoured the call to direct expression in paint, rather than the Marxist analysis of Western civilisation propagated by Constant. He had little time for Constant and Dotremont's theoretical pamphlets, devoting his CoBrA years to painting innocent, childlike creatures and fabulous beasts in bright colours, utilizing simple forms and bold lines.

After CoBrA Appel maintained an emotional approach to his subject. During the Fifties he developed a heavier painting style, with line and areas of colour melting together into evocative swathes of paint. Alongside his paintings, the versatile Appel made assemblages and sculptures, and also wrote poetry. Right up until his death in Zurich on May 3, 2006, Appel remained the hard-working, almost obsessive painter he had always been.

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