



COBRA

A PICTORIAL AND POETIC REVOLUTION

EDITOR
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HANNIBAL



THE ART OF INTUITION

PREFACE

KARINE HUTS-VAN DEN HEUVEL

The story of the Cobra art movement is a classic one: in an unguarded moment, a new generation of painters, poets and dramatists succeeded in drawing attention to their work. They gained a degree of approval, a certain number of admirers and had little choice but to support each other. At first, they were reviled by art critics and the public: 'Is this art? How dare they call *that* art? It's primitive. Like the drawings of a child or a lunatic. And they're all Communists, you know!'

The movement's theorists, Constant Nieuwenhuys, Christian Dotremont and Asger Jorn, were indeed influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx. Before the emergence of Cobra, the so-called *Internationale van experimentele kunstenaars* [International for Experimental Artists], Europe and its art lay in ruins. Each of the artists who raised the Cobra banner in the turbulent post-war years responded fiercely and viscerally to this desperate situation. Carl Jung said that an artist's 'handwriting' was the most direct expression of the human psyche – one that reveals their unconscious stirrings. Many Cobra members were indeed devotees of Jung, yet most of all they loathed a Western culture founded on Reason. While they had all come through the Second World War, they had been deeply scarred by it and were under no illusions about what human beings were capable of. Art was straitjacketed by outdated rules and conventions.

The artists were each looking, in their own way, for a new, untainted and indelible handwriting.

The critics were right: Cobra paintings really were primitive – annoyingly childish, even. Was this deliberate? The very colours they used seemed second rate. And to make matters worse, they smeared their garish primary tones almost formlessly over the canvas. Many exhibition-goers were shocked, just as they no doubt would have been by the Action Painting that was emerging in America at roughly the same time as a mode of expression by the likes of Jackson Pollock.

The cross-border aspect of the Cobra movement was also largely unique for the time: Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam – CoBrA. Freakish though their alliance might have seemed, in reality the bond between the artists was remarkably faithful to a time-honoured tradition, forged chiefly in Paris. The seven-headed movement also recalled the *naga*, the legendary part-human, part-snake often found accompanying and protecting the Buddha.

The fact that the artists did not wish to work aesthetically was a secondary consideration, while their lack of specialisation was in their nature: some were poets who painted, others were painters who wrote poetry. They also took photographs and sculpted, and used junk to create all kinds of assemblages. Some even painted the occasional mural together. As Lucebert put it in one of his poems:

In this time, what was always called
beauty has scorched beauty's face

As they pursued their personal handwriting, the Cobra artists created a style with a language all their own – one based, incidentally, on a primitive alphabet, assuming that ‘primitive’ is not understood pejoratively. Cobra was all about returning to the source. It drew on authentic forms of folk art, Eastern calligraphy, occult symbols, rock drawings, what was referred to at the time as ‘Negro Art’, and other forms of primal expression. But it was perhaps children’s drawings that were the greatest source of inspiration, especially in terms of colour and form. Such drawings undoubtedly bubbled up from them spontaneously, like old memories reborn in powerful colours out of the deepest obscurity.

The sheer number of artists who belonged to the movement tells us that they were all expressing the same *air du temps* – and for all their apparent carelessness, they did so with immense precision. No matter how different Cobra’s artists might have been, what they had in common was the way they intuited and recorded colours and emotions in an entirely innovative way – and with unprecedented brutality. It would trigger a profound generational conflict: ‘How dare they use the world of the child to daub over the serious intent of previous generations?’

In its purest form, Cobra was not destined to survive for long as an artists’ collective or style. The group fell apart after a few years, not least because of the quashing. In the early 1950s, of post-war utopianism as the Cold War brought a new chill. Yet Cobra had awakened something fundamental in everyone who belonged to the group, as well as in the generations that followed. Art became more spontaneous and broke out of its conventional straitjacket. Virtually all the erstwhile Cobra members went off in different directions after 1951, some more successfully than others. It is then up to history to decide whether the movement added anything substantive to art in the second half of the twentieth century.

Why collect Cobra art?

Curiosity is an important motive for collecting modern and contemporary art. The Cobra movement leaps out in this respect, with what were, at the time, entirely new and powerful forms of expression. In the 1940s and early 1950s, Cobra was the only fully-fledged, contemporaneous European response to American Abstract Expressionism and Action Painting.

The movement’s forerunners prior to and during the Second World War included the Danish painter and art theorist Ejler Bille and his compatriot Egil Jacobsen. The latter had expressed his fury at the German invasion of Czechoslovakia in the work *Ophobning* [Accumulation], resorting to splatters, dripping and proliferating smears of paint to evoke the inwardly lucid individual who finds himself surrounded by terrifying and irresistible forces. Carl-Henning Pedersen was another forerunner as well as a highly accomplished poet. In roughly the same period, he painted masks and seemed to delight in the fantasy world of the child. The result was an extremely personal and mysterious world of fable, shrouded during the war years in sombre reds, fierce greens and menacing blues. Once the conflict was over, his palette brightened to include whites and yellows. After the war, it was a certain Asger Jørgensen who took the lead. Shortening his name to Asger Jorn, he forged contacts with fellow artists

abroad, including the Dutchman Constant Nieuwenhuys. This ultimately led to the founding of the journal *Cobra*, which for several years provided the movement with a legitimate platform.

Another of Cobra’s forerunners was undoubtedly the Le Havre-born Jean Dubuffet. The Frenchman’s wild style (which included incorporating broken glass and asphalt in his paintings) offered a powerful prelude to the brutality of Cobra. Dubuffet, too, was inspired by the drawings of children, people with mental illnesses, and prisoners. He built up a substantial collection of their work, for which he coined the name *Art brut* to describe their shared style. The bright and spontaneously bolsterous blue, red, yellow and green colour patterns we see in Dubuffet mean that he is rightly regarded as one of the grandfathers of Cobra.

Cobra’s importance lies not only in its brutal splattering of colour and almost rudimentary expression of emotions, but also in the reception of its visual language. A telling illustration is provided by a seemingly trivial incident in January 1950, when a mural entitled ‘*Vragende kinderen*’ [Questioning Children] in the canteen of the then City Hall in Amsterdam was hidden behind a false wall and papered over. The Dutch artist Karel Appel had painted it the previous year, having been inspired by the dozens of children he had seen begging in German railway stations after the war. Rarely has a work of art sparked such debate. Journalists lampooned it, council staff declared that they would no longer eat in the canteen, and visitors were mostly united in their opinion that the work marred the walls. So, despite the protests of his fellow artists, Appel’s mural disappeared behind the wallpaper for ten years. *Questioning Children* illustrates both the social and political engagement of several of the artists affiliated with Cobra, a stance that ultimately fed into the student protests and strikes of May ’68, among other things. Parallels with Cobra can also be found in the work of the contemporary Belgian artists Jan Fabre and Wim Delvoye.

This undeniable generational conflict and accompanying break with the past aroused the curiosity of art lovers, encouraging them to investigate and collect Cobra. Many of the group’s artists were strong personalities and, like Asger Jorn, clung doggedly to Cobra’s original energy. Jorn turned down a prestigious award from MoMa in New York, for instance, as he failed to understand how the deepest stirrings of his soul could possibly qualify for a prize.

The war had ripped people’s souls apart. Beauty had turned to rubble. Culture and politics had been lumped together. Many had shown their true face, stripped of the veneer of civilisation. Yet an unprecedented optimism arose from the same ruins. The time was ripe and painters were more perceptive than ever. A shared feeling emerged, a remarkable togetherness. It would culminate in Cobra and, within a few short years, in other styles and forms of expression, exuberant or gentle, each according to the artist’s own nature. It is not the subject matter in Cobra that screams out, but the colours; not beauty that appeals to the imagination, but the primal images. Cobra’s poetry was childlike, its monsters the terrors of children. Cobra is never entirely done, not even in your deepest stirrings. There is always something to discover in Cobra. It never grows dull. And Cobra often awakens the child in us too. The movement contained the stem cells, as it were, that have since proliferated in many modes of contemporary art to form something untouchably tangible. Which is why, to us, Cobra represents the art of intuition.

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Cornelia
Le guerrier
 [The Warrior], 1949
 Oil on canvas, 59.5 x 50 cm
 The Phoebus Foundation,
 Antwerp

COBRA: INVITATION TO A DÉGUSTATION

PAUL HUVENNE

This book is intended as a tasting session. Like a visit to a fine wine cellar. For those who are new to Cobra, it offers a solid and thorough introduction to the movement. For the connoisseurs, however, it will be a moment of intense appreciation and an invitation to apply your knowledge and discernment because what we serve up in this publication is of the very highest quality.

We have not set out to be exhaustive or to present the kind of encyclopaedic survey you might expect from a formal course. The aim is rather to showcase the pleasure that is to be had from this work. Our hope is to draw the reader/viewer into the unique experience that Cobra artists had in mind for their public – with the same sense of artistic joy and freedom, free from any whiff of academic condescension or bourgeois prejudice. The fascinating collection that prompted this project arose from within just such an atmosphere. By looking through the same eyes as the collectors Karine Van den Heuvel and Fernand Huts, you will discover how that collection came about and how to experience Cobra as a pictorial and poetic revolution. Their story shows that the Cobra movement is still very much alive in contemporary art circles.

For my part, I intended this book, this experience, to map out the anarchic history of Cobra. Its story is expertly retold in a series of essays, each time from a different, specific angle. A little like a novel in which the same event is recounted in successive chapters by a different witness each time.

Johan Pas uncovers the stories of the Cobra artists through their own publications. Hilde de Bruijn explains how their subject matter motivated them. Piet Thomas links them with their literary contemporaries, and Piet Boyens examines the Cobra legacy through to the present day. Their contributions can be read in any order, depending on your inclination. The same obviously goes for the biographies of the twenty-two Cobra artists whose work is included in the collection, mini-monographs that outline the artists' highly varied contribution to the movement. Some of them – Dotremont, Alechinsky, Tahiri and Pedersen, for instance – remained loyal to Cobra throughout their lives, whereas others, such as Appel or Claus, viewed their involvement as one stage in their artistic careers. We automatically associate Jorn, Appel, Dotremont and Alechinsky with Cobra, but it is fascinating to learn how many others were also involved.

Most of all, however, this book focuses on the collection itself, with some two hundred works. The pleasure of viewing is heightened by a series of box texts authored by true Cobra experts: Laura Stamps looks at *Haan* [Cock] by Constant, Shinkichi Tajiri's *Sentinelle* and *Torso* by Henry Heerup... and for some added seasoning, several iconic Cobra themes are explored in more depth: Naomi Meulemans writes about the myth of spontaneity, while I discuss the origin of the name 'Cobra', the bird motif, the snake motif and the legendary hospitality with which the movement is associated.

Anyone wishing to immerse themselves in the movement will find several metres' worth of reading matter on the bookshelf. This will inevitably bring you to Willemijn Stokvis' standard work on the history of Cobra – her doctoral thesis, which first appeared in book form in 1974.

She continued to update and improve this, her life's work, throughout her career. If you start with her book, you are well advised to look at Cobra's magazine too, as well as related publications such as *Le Petit Cobra*, *Le Tout Petit Cobra*, and the many pamphlets and other printed matter. A great deal of original material can be found in The Phoebus Foundation's collection, some of which can also be consulted in the form of reprints and facsimiles. They plunge you straight into the atmosphere of the early Cobra period and reveal, for instance, that the movement was much broader than the visual arts alone. Cobra was the lovechild of Surrealism and also sums up just about everything to do with Modernism. Following in the footsteps of the Russian avant-garde, the movement was eager to demolish the barriers between the various art forms. *Cobra* magazine thus featured a blend of poetry, folklore, reports, discourses, accounts of contemporary art, cartoons, comics and photography. The movement was also receptive to film and jazz music. The Cobra world was too complex, however, to be shoehorned into a manifesto, too hospitable to turn in on itself. Wayward, liberated and provocative, the group cast aside all the bourgeois values that had led to a failing new order. It set its face against nationalism, capitalism, colonialism and the docile good manners associated with them. In that respect, Cobra was a precursor of the Dutch Provo movement and of May '68.

To anyone with a knowledge of Cobra's literature and reception it is perplexing to see how curators over the years have reduced the art-historical significance of the movement in their retrospectives and catalogues to a simple grouping within the visual arts, even if we have to admit that the interaction between these passionate and disparate figures – poets, writers, critics, painters, sculptors, filmmakers – was stormy and chaotic, and that its offshoots and collaborations continued long after the group had officially called it quits. The ceramic adventures in Albisola, for instance, or Dotremont and Noiret's exhibition *Cobra et après (et même avant)*. *Un panorama graphique* [Cobra and After (and Even Before): A Graphic Panorama].

It is also striking that Cobra has been appropriated all too often within a national context, even though the movement was globalised before the term even existed and embraced many more nationalities than its acronym name suggested. In Denmark, for instance, Cobra became Danish. Due not only to the role that Asger Jorn played in the group's creation, but also very much to the way the group went on to colour the Danish museum landscape. In the Netherlands, meanwhile, Cobra and Karel Appel were canonised as exponents of Dutch national heritage. Any number of exhibitions with interesting catalogues and monographs have merely confirmed the trend. It took a while for the Belgian branch of Cobra to reach its full potential, despite the fact that Dotremont – creator of the CoBrA acronym – had initially managed the entire organisation; long after the group had broken up, he was still paying off its debts. In the end, though, Dotremont too received the recognition he deserved. Together with Alechinsky, the group's only survivor, he constantly pointed out that Cobra was more than a style, it was an attitude: something that punk rockers in the late 70s and beyond could readily identify with.

An open attitude towards experiencing art; the spontaneous expression to which interaction with the material pushes and seduces the maker; the easy sense of casual togetherness in the creative moment. Cobra is what you do. Cobra is what you are. That's the feeling this book wants to evoke in the reader/viewer.

It will not come as a surprise that a movement so focused on material and on the process of making was not readily understood by a generation to whom conceptual art was the be-all and end-all. Cobra seems to have dropped out of the discourse of contemporary art museums in recent decades. Yet a visit to the richly stocked collection of The Phoebus Foundation instantly makes clear just how relevant Cobra remains today.

Elior Bille
Dyrotvormer
[Animal Forms], 1964
Oil on canvas, 55.5 x 46.5 cm
The Phoebus Foundation,
Antwerp





Karel Appel
Two bathers in the sea
[Two Bathers in the Sea], 1967
Oil on canvas, 130 x 190 cm
The Phoebus Foundation,
Antwerp



Karel Appel
Figuren (Figures), 1993
Acrylic on canvas, 95 x 230 cm
The Proebus Foundation,
Antwerp



COBRA: NEVER WENT AWAY

PAUL HUVENNE



Frank Maleu
International Art, 2013
25 painted sculptures,
10 x 65 x 60 cm
University of Antwerp,
Antwerp

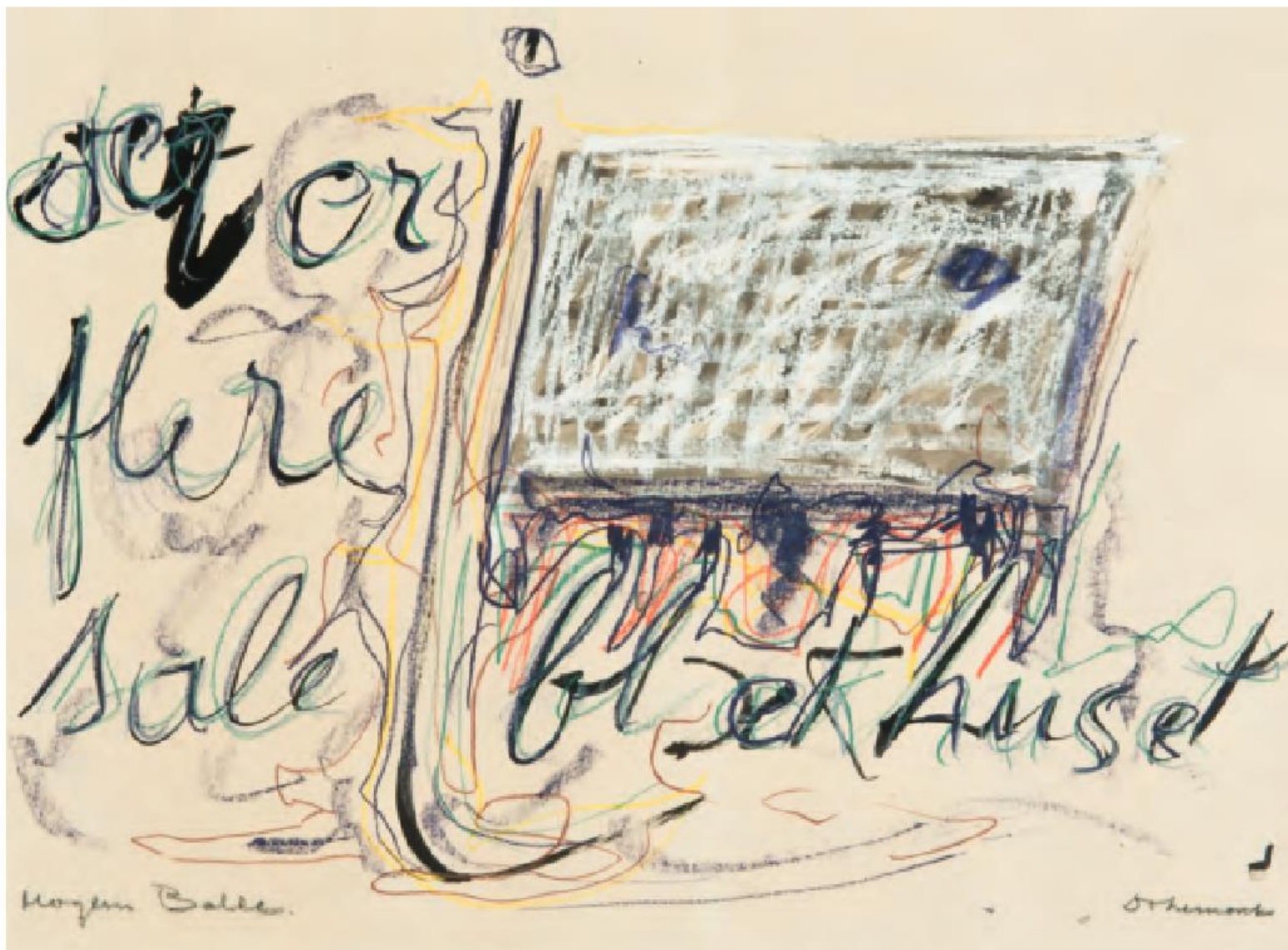
p. 18
Gathering of
Cobra artists,
undated

Nowhere is Cobra more aptly presented than in the little room that the artist Frank Maieu set up in 2023 for the 'Museum to Scale 17' – an initiative of Ronny Van de Velde – which you can visit at Antwerp University's city campus. Maieu used twenty-five cartoonish, polychrome figurines – each going wild in its own biotope – to offer a comical survey of modern art from the vantage point of Sigmund Freud's waiting room. You can spot Vincent van Gogh, Pablo Picasso, Salvador Dalí and Marcel Duchamp, all identified by a characteristic attribute.

While the big names of Modernism do their best to steel the show, the Cobra crew sit on a little bench in a corner at the back. Freud ignores them, as the screaming Edvard Munch is an even more desperate case. For their part, the panicking Cobra members are caught in the stranglehold of a giant snake. The viewer recognises a neat parody of the Laocoön group – the Hellenistic sculpture that held Western academic art in its grip for centuries.⁷ (Only a pedant would point out that cobras bite their prey rather than constricting it.) The little group captures, at a glance, so much of what the Cobra movement represents: a milestone in the history of modern art; an unbelievable mishmash of personalities; an infinitely tangled story, which Christian Dotremont once called a 'train wreck': 'Cobra is the irresistible hand dragging its members to their destiny, before ultimately suffocating them in a chaotic mess or, to quote Dotremont again, a force'.⁸ A shared adventure that needs to be kept in perspective and in which humour is never far away. Cobra was always funny, even when things got serious. Looking at Maieu's Cobra-Laocoön group, we immediately recognise the painters Karel Appel, Pierre Alechinsky and Asger Jorn. You might wonder why he chose these particular artists. Why Alechinsky, for instance, where you might reasonably expect Dotremont? But these three are immediately recognisable and, as *pars pro toto*, neatly represent the overall movement.

Cobra was founded on 8 November 1948 in a room at the café-hotel Notre-Dame on the corner of the Rue Saint-Jacques in Paris. The Dane Asger Jorn (1914-1973), the Belgians Christian Dotremont (1922-1979) and Joseph Noret (1927-2012), and the Dutch artists Constant (Nieuwenhuis) (1920-2006), Karel Appel (1921-2006) and Corneille (1922-2020) agreed to endorse Dotremont's pamphlet *La cause était entendue* [The Cause was Decided]. And that was that: A few days later, Dotremont came up with the name Cobra (also written CoBra and COBRA), as an acronym for COpenhagen, BRussels and Amsterdam. It proved to be a very strong logo: Dotremont's friend Alechinsky was not there at the very beginning but joined the group as a kind of d'Artagnan to their Three Musketeers. It is thanks to him, perhaps, that Cobra did not end up slipping through the cracks of the collective memory.

Cobra was short-lived: the movement disbanded in 1952. For many of its members it was just a phase in their career, from which they would later distance themselves, as Appel put it bluntly in his interviews with Simon Vinkenoog. When Jörn ended up in the sanatorium in Silkeborg, depressed and ill, he came to the bitter conclusion that 'the artistic venture we called COBRA had produced a splintered wreck...'.¹⁷ Yet no one summed up the hangover of Cobra better than the Flemish author Hugo Claus in his 1993 poem *COBRA*,¹⁸ in which he looked back on the events years afterwards, just as Maleu had done in his peephole.



COBRA

Was it a hot time back then?
Had the unending world become malleable
after the food shortages?

The golden ratio was despised,
symmetry was treason, knowledge ballast
gnomes popping up everywhere in shaky
scratches, doubled-up lines,
bumping into each other and crowing,
spattered with Prussian blue,
all with the black-rimmed eyes
of the Cow Goddess.
Playing at rapturous Incarnation.

Until there were too many animals grazing,
too many morons mooing,
too many idiots painting with their toes.
The Bird Goddess saw and she commanded
that you should eat your dreams.
And so you did. You became a part
of the world's cake.
You kept painting the scarecrow
on the otherwise deserted playground.

From Hugo Claus, *De Sporen*,
Amsterdam, 1993, p. 26.

Christian Dotremont &
Mogens Balle
Composition, c.1963-77
Indian ink and oil pastel
on paper, 420 x 495 mm
The Phoebus Foundation,
Antwerp

Yet not all the movement's former members looked back on their Cobra adventure quite so damningly. The Danes, for instance, kept the faith. Jorn and Constant, by contrast, gradually headed off in an entirely different direction after 1951. Corneille sold his soul and ultimately converted to Pop Art. Appel went on to do other things, but he never shed his Cobra attitude. In an attempt to recuperate some of the success (and financial rewards) that Cobra had enjoyed, Dotremont revived the movement in 1956 with his exhibition *Cobra après Cobra* at Galerie Taptoe in Brussels and the exhibition *Cobra et après (et même avant)*. *Un panorama graphique* [Cobra and After (and Even Before): A Graphic Panorama], which he organised in collaboration with Noiret in 1962. The work of his friend Alechinsky, the longest surviving of them all, is permeated by the idea of Cobra to this day. When Dotremont was given his retrospective in New York in 1978, thirty years after Cobra, he wondered whether, in all those years, there had been another movement with such minimal artistic organisation that had been as firmly anchored in social reality. In his view, the fact that the group had broken up meant, paradoxically, that Cobra could remain itself: young, spontaneous and unconstrained. That it had no need to stage a comeback, since it never went away.

So it was that many of the former members became friends for life, and reunited years later to do all sorts of things in the true spirit of Cobra. This is how Dotremont came to work with the Dane Mogens Balle on his *quatre-mains* in 1962, 1963 and 1969. The collaboration between Alechinsky and Dotremont was shown, meanwhile, at the 1972 Venice Biennale, and they worked together again in 1976 on a piece for the Anneessens underground railway station in Brussels.⁹ For their part, Claus and Alechinsky collaborated in 1995 on a work that can be seen at Antwerp University's Middelheim campus.

In the meantime, the movement carved out its place in the art-historical canon. Cobra is represented internationally in just about every high-profile collection and museum of modern art. Denmark has its Jorn Museum in Silkeborg and the Carl-Henning Pedersen & Else Alfelt Museum in Herning, and there is a Cobra Museum in Amstelveen in the Netherlands. But there are also significant Cobra clusters in various museums of modern and contemporary art, including the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Humlebæk, thirty-five kilometres from Copenhagen, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam and the Stedelijk Museum in Schiedam, near Rotterdam. Works by the Belgian chapter of Cobra can be found in the Royal Museums of Fine Arts in Brussels and the S.M.A.K. in Ghent. Outside Europe, there is a Cobra Collection & Research Center at the NSU Art Museum in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and fascinating ensembles of Cobra art can also be seen at MoMA in New York.

How it all started

Nowadays, Cobra is internationally regarded as an important catalyst in the history of art. With French as its working language, it was virtually the last truly European movement within Modernism as economic developments meant that the United States took over from the Old Continent at this point as the pre-eminent international cultural centre. What happened subsequently in Europe in the 1950s seems more like a prelude to postmodern conceptualism – a local flurry compared to the hurricane of activity in New York. Karel Appel, who sensed all this better than anyone, converted to US-style Abstract Expressionism via an exhibition at Martha Jackson's New York gallery as early as 1954, the very moment he was producing his most iconic Cobra work.¹⁰

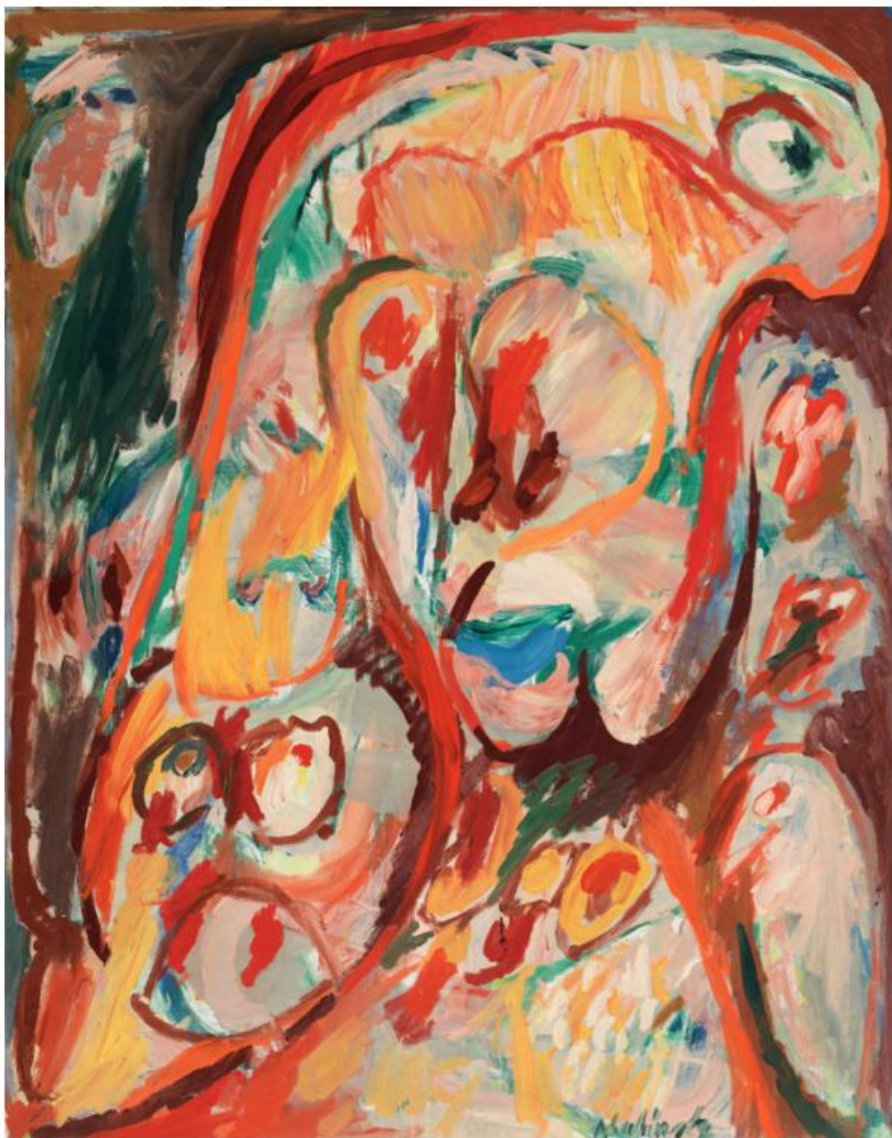


Karel Appel
Vogel [Bird], 1954
Oil on canvas, 79 × 114 cm
The Phoebus Foundation,
Antwerp

Cobra: never went away

Paul Huvenne

25



Pierre Alechinsky
Pris à témoin
 [Called to Witness], 1982
 Oil on canvas, 147.5 × 114.3 cm
 The Phosbus Foundation,
 Antwerp

> Asger Jorn
Untitled, 1963
 Oil on panel, 50 × 40 cm
 The Phosbus Foundation,
 Antwerp



writer developed a taste for Existentialism and Surrealism and got to know experimental poets such as Simon Vinkenoog, with whom he corresponded for years. But Claus also drew and painted and, as a member of Cobra, did so unmistakably using the vocabulary of fantastical, hybrid creatures that was so typical of the group. He also produced surrealist collages with women as the central motif.

In the early 1950s, Claus shared a studio with Appel and Cornelle in Paris. His friends inspired him and they embarked on joint projects. Lithographs by Alechinsky were included in his poetry collection *Zonder vorm van proces* [Without Due Process] and drawings by Appel in *De blijde en onvoorziene week* [The Joyous and Unforeseen Week]. Claus made several *peintures-mots* or word-paintings with Dotremont. He also joined the Vijftigers poetry movement, to which his friend Vinkenoog belonged and of which Lucebert was the leading figure. It was from the latter that he adopted his anti-rationalism and irony.

Claus became close friends with some of the Cobra artists, but over the years he increasingly distanced himself from the movement. He looked back ironically on the Cobra period in his 1988 novel *Een zachte vernieling* [A Gentle Destruction], while in his poem COBRA from the 1993 collection *De Sporen* [Traces] he took the group to task for its casual experimentation: 'Was it a hot time back then?'

In 1953, Claus travelled to Rome, where Elly was acting in a number of films. They returned to Belgium two years later, settled in Ghent and got married. He published *De Oostakkerse gedachten* [The Oostakker Poems], which immediately became a great success. Poetry collections, novels and plays came as thick and fast in the 1960s and 1970s as his travel, changes of address and romantic partners. His relationship with the Dutch actress Sylvia Kristel – known at the time as the star of the French erotic film *Emmanuelle* – is probably the one that most caught the public imagination.

Claus published his masterpiece, *Het verdriet van België* [The Sorrow of Belgium] in 1983. The novel deals with collaboration and resistance during the Second World War, while settling scores with the Catholic milieu in which he grew up in East Flanders province. He also directed films, including *De Leeuw van Vlaanderen* [The Lion of



Flanders] based on the nineteenth-century historical novel by Hendrik Conscience.

Hugo Claus published over one hundred and fifty individual titles and consistently won awards, making him the most garlanded author in the Dutch-speaking region. The most important came in 1986, when he received the prestigious Prijs der Nederlandse Letteren.

The Cobra Museum in Amsterdam organised a retrospective of Claus' visual art in the autumn of 2006, entitled *Souvenir*. In their spontaneous and unforced style, his paintings – untitled and signed simply 'Claus' – convey the original meaning of Cobra. De Zwarte Panter gallery also presented a selection of his work with the title *Woordenloos* [Without Words].

Hugo Claus was diagnosed with Alzheimer's the following year, having already made clear that he would request euthanasia. Veerle De Wit, his second wife, announced on 19 March 2008 that Claus had died. With the West-Flemish phrase *Téttatutis* – 'time it was over' – he indicated that the moment had come to say goodbye. He exited the stage after one last glass of champagne and cigarette.

Georges Collignon

Belgium
26 August 1923
5 February 2002

Collignon had little affinity with Dotremont and Jom's Cobra movement, but five of his works were nevertheless included in the 1951 exhibition in Liège. He also designed the cover for the fourth issue of *Le Petit Cobra* (Winter 1950-1951). In 1950, he exhibited alongside Alechinsky, Cornelle and Doucet at Galerie Maeght in Paris. Collignon met Dotremont when the latter came to view his exhibition at Galerie Apollo in Brussels. It was through him that the Liège group of artists, of which he was a member, came to be renamed Réalité-Cobra. Although its members, Pol Bury among them, were plainly intrigued by Cobra – the word featured on the cover of their journal and their publications depicted the coiled snake – the two groups had little in common. Réalité-Cobra was too firmly associated with formal abstract art for that.

— Collignon studied typography at the École du Livre in Liège in 1937-1939. During the war years, he enrolled at the city's Academy of Fine Arts to avoid being called up for compulsory employment in Germany. He studied Surrealism in general and René Magritte in particular while working part-time at the Cristalleries du Val Saint-Lambert in Seraing.

Collignon joined the Jeune Peinture Belge [Young Belgian Painting] group in 1946. He painted figuratively at first, but swiftly arrived at a lively lyrical abstraction after an intense

study of colour theory. This resulted in 'topographical paintings', in which small, coloured areas that fill the entire canvas alternate with colour shades in refined partitions and with rhythmic, curvilinear movements.

In 1950, Collignon was awarded the Prix de la Jeune Peinture Belge along with Pierre Alechinsky and Jean Duboscq. Two years later, he co-founded the group Art abstrait [Abstract Art] and was awarded the Prix Hélène Jacquet. A bursary from the French state enabled Collignon to settle in Paris, where he lived from 1961 to 1968. In the late 1950s, he also devoted himself to cubist collages of paper and fabrics. He joined the architecture group EGAU and executed several bas-reliefs for Liège University.

After an absence of twenty years, Collignon returned to his native Liège, where he once again painted neo-figurative compositions in which figurative elements are reconciled with abstract structures. His works frequently have erotic undertones that nod towards Klimt's Jugendstil atmosphere. The artist had a predilection not only for the female figure, but also for suits of armour and artists' dummies, which he incorporated in an explosion of colours. This was to be his most successful period.

Collignon continued to create art tirelessly until the end of his life, constantly searching for new techniques, materials and themes. He died in 2002 in his beloved Liège.

Constant [Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys]

Netherlands
21 July 1920
1 August 2005

Constant Anton Nieuwenhuys, better known simply as Constant, was another Cobra artist from the outset. It was probably down to him that Appel and Corneille joined the Cobra movement, as they had known each other from the Experimentele Groep in Holland [Experimental Group in Holland]. Constant was the Dutch contingent's theoretician. He did not view Cobra as a shop window for selling his work, but as a collective with the potential to change society. He believed that every human being possessed the same universal creativity, which he wanted to liberate through Cobra. His art was thus placed entirely at the service of his political engagement.

— Constant received a Jesuit education and continued his studies at the Instituut voor Kunstnijverheidsonderwijs [Institute for Applied Arts Education] and the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten [State Academy of Fine Arts] in Amsterdam. He was fond of Cézanne's work and was impressed by the German Expressionists of Die Brücke. Constant married Matie, daughter of the composer Jakob van Domselaer, in 1942. The couple moved to Amsterdam in early 1943 when the Germans evacuated the rural town of Bergen in the province of North Holland. Constant refused to register with the collaborationist *Kultuurkamer* and so was not permitted to pursue his profession as an artist. He was unable to buy materials but wanted to continue painting, so he resorted to tablecloths and bed linen and dissolved the paint from finished canvases. He was eventually obliged to go into hiding, to avoid *Arbeitseinsatz*, compulsory deployment for the German war effort.

The war years left Constant with a lifelong aversion to bourgeois society. He asked himself what role the visual artist might play in a modern community. After the war, he met Asger Jorn at a Miró exhibition in Paris, a meeting that would prove both artistically and ideologically decisive for Cobra. Jorn visited Constant in Amsterdam and began to

correspond with him intensively. Constant was quick to assimilate the fantasy creatures and spontaneity of Danish art into his work, but he also appreciated Jorn's theoretical thinking. He also came into contact with Appel and Corneille, and together they founded the Experimentele Groep in Holland in the summer of 1948. Constant published his Manifesto in their journal *Reflex*, calling for a new principle of social living 'that will form its laws from the immediate demands of human vitality'.

Cobra had barely been founded, however, before it turned into something of a snakepit for him. His wife Matie left him for his comrade-in-art Jorn, and he had a serious disagreement with Dotremont about Socialist Realism, as propagated by the Russian Communists, which Constant was alone in admiring. To escape the tensions within Cobra, he relocated to Paris with his son. Unable to come to terms with the suffering of the war, he painted dark canvases that clearly reflected his sombre mood.

The British Arts Council invited Constant to visit London, where he made numerous contacts and also embarked on a new artistic vision. Despite his earlier opposition to Mondrian and De Stijl, he now turned to geometric abstraction. Constant grew increasingly interested in architecture and the importance of colour; space now became his central theme. Collaborating with the architect Aldo van Eyck, he set out his ideas in the essay 'For a Spatial Colourism'. Having returned to Amsterdam, Constant shut himself away in his studio and began to design spatial models.

In the meantime, he divorced Matie, married Nellie Riemens – the eldest sister of the photographer Henny Riemens, Corneille's partner – and resumed his correspondence with Jorn. The latter had recently founded the *Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste* (MIBI), through which he envisaged an innovative form of architecture. Jorn invited his old friend to the MIBI meeting in Alba in 1956, at which they discussed how artists might influence the cityscape and, by extension, people's behaviour.



It was here that Constant met Pinot Gallizio, who owned a piece of land on which gypsies sometimes set up camp, giving Constant the idea of designing a permanent gypsy camp for Alba. So it was that he embarked on the new project that would occupy him for seventeen years: *New Babylon*, the city of the future, for his ideal society. Besides drawings and pamphlets, he produced paintings and photo-montages about his utopia. He believed that only architecture could move people to adopt a new way of living and engage in greater creativity. In 1958, Constant joined the Situationist International (SI), an avant-garde group that aimed to create new behaviour in a new social space. His theoretical writings also had an impact: in 1998, the American professor Mark Wigley published the book *Constant's New Babylon: The Hyper-Architecture of Desire*, setting out the Dutchman's progressive ideas and his influence on leading architects.

In 1955, Constant began to receive a variety of national and international prizes. He took part in numerous art events, exhibited at the 1966 Venice Biennale, including his *New Babylon* project, and also participated in documenta XI in 2002. His work has featured in countless exhibitions, from Paris to New York. The largest of these was probably the 2006 exhibition at the Cobra Museum in Amstelveen, where works from different periods and with different techniques were shown. There was also a major exhibition in 2016 entitled *Constant-New Babylon* at the Gemeentemuseum, now the Kunstmuseum, in The Hague.

Cornelle [Guillaume Cornelis van Beverloo]

Belgium
3 July 1922
5 September 2010

Cornelle was a core member of Cobra, one of the six signatories of the manifesto *La cause était entendue* and joint organiser of the group's exhibitions.

— He was born in Liège, Belgium, to Dutch parents who returned to the Netherlands when the boy was twelve. His bilingual upbringing would stand him in good stead later on. Although he always described himself as self-taught, he signed up for drawing and painting classes at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam at the age of eighteen. It was there that he met Karel Appel, with whom he began to collaborate intensively in Appel's studio.

Fearing deportation to work in Germany's war economy, Cornelle spent the occupation years in hiding and in great poverty. Painting became a therapy for him during this period: he worked through his fear and sorrow in his art. When liberation came, he symbolically destroyed these sombre wartime works so as to start with a clean slate.

A period of discovery now began for the young artist. He got to know French painting, travelled with Appel to Liège, and came into contact in Brussels with the Jeune Peinture Belge [Young Belgian Painting] group, through which they met artists such as Louis Van Lint and Marc Mendelson. In 1946, Cornelle exhibited his work for the first time at the *Jonge schilders* [Young Painters] exhibition organised by Willem Sandberg, director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. A few months later, Cornelle had a one-man show in Groningen, and in the following year, he and Appel had an exhibition at the Gildehuys in Amsterdam.

Then, in 1947, something strange happened. One day, Cornelle was walking down the street with a handcart loaded with paintings he was hoping to sell when a woman stopped

him. She was so enthusiastic about the work she saw that she invited the young artist to visit her native Hungary and show it in Budapest. Barely a few weeks later, he found himself on the banks of the Danube where he made the acquaintance of the European School – a post-war avant-garde group comparable to Cobra.

The sight of Budapest in ruins made a huge impression on him. The otherworldly spectacle of the damaged, collapsed and overgrown buildings opened up a new, transcendental realm, which also found its way into his work. He developed an organic and colourful formal language, which was expressed not only in his painting, but also in countless collages and assemblages.

It was also in Budapest that he met the French painter Jacques Doucet, who introduced him to the playful world of Joan Miró.



Cornelle immersed himself in Surrealist literature and got to know the work of the German Expressionists, of whom he particularly admired Paul Klee. But Cornelle's ultimate source of inspiration remained Vincent van Gogh, with whom he shared a passion for colour, form and nature.

In the autumn of 1947, Cornelle and Karel Appel travelled to Paris where they visited one exhibition after another. Appel also introduced him to Constant. The three young artists were united in their urge for innovation and a formal language of their own. After exhibiting together at the Santee Landweer gallery in Amsterdam, they founded the Experimentele Groep in Holland [Experimental Group in Holland], with the journal *Reflex* as their mouthpiece. The group amalgamated with the international Cobra movement in 1949.

Like so many of the people associated with Cobra, Cornelle was a passionate traveller. He was inspired, for instance, by the bright colours, desert landscapes and intense life of Tunisia. In Denmark, meanwhile, he and Karel Appel were impressed by the imaginative painting of Carl-Henning Pedersen. Cornelle spontaneously began to place his familiar motifs – female figures, birds, cats and landscapes – in mythological and pristine contexts, all in a poetic manner. His bright, sensual reds and generally eccentric use of colour were typical of his work.

After Cobra disbanded, Cornelle swapped Amsterdam for Paris and also began to travel further afield and more intensively. He and his wife, the photographer Henny Riemens, explored the African continent, beginning in Algeria, followed by the Sahara and lastly the area between Senegal and Kenya. Cornelle collected a large amount of art from the local people he encountered, which would later strongly influence his work. These artefacts and colour combinations are clearly recognisable in his figurative, imaginary style, and

his collection was already being featured in a variety of photographic books in the 1970s. A major exhibition was devoted to it in The Hague in 1992: *The African Face of Cornelle*.

Cornelle recorded his impressions in a travel journal, extracts from which were published, including the notes on his Sahara trip in 1952. As the 1950s drew to a close, it was the turn of the United States, from where he travelled on to South America. He also visited Majorca, Yugoslavia, Leningrad and Israel. Only towards the end of the 1970s did he make his first trip to Southeast Asia.

Something else Cornelle had in common with his fellow Cobra members was the urge to explore different fields of art. Like Alechinsky, he took lessons in the print-making studio of Stanley William Hayter, participated with Appel and Jorn in the *Rencontres internationales de la céramique* in Albisola, and made designs for carpets, jewellery and large polychrome sculptures in wood.

Cornelle's art was non-figurative at first, but in the course of the 1960s he gradually evolved towards fantasy landscapes in warm tones, frequently characterised by symbiotic representations of female figures, flowers, gardens, the earth, the city and birds – the same motifs that had typified his work during the Cobra period. He laid his canvases flat on the ground to work on, an Eastern approach that meant his body could move freely over the canvas during the process of creation, enabling him to depict shapes more directly and spontaneously. Many compositions were also executed from a bird's eye view.

Cornelle kept a studio in Paris where he continued to work until the end of his life, while actually living in seclusion in Auvers-sur-Oise. He was eventually buried there in 2010, just like Vincent van Gogh in 1890, of whom he was always an immense admirer: after all, to Cornelle's mind, painting was not a hobby or a job, but a vocation.

Egil Jacobsen

Denmark
16 December 1910
21 April 1998

Jacobsen's involvement with Cobra was tangential: his work only featured in the movement's first exhibition in Brussels, and was barely mentioned in the journal *Cobra*. All the same, as the creator of the spontaneous, 'myth-creating' art through which the Danes made their mark on the group, the artist indirectly helped define the movement's style.

— Jacobsen was mostly self-taught, having spent barely a semester in 1932–1933 at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. He was taught there by Kræsten Iversen and Peder Hald, and so his painting initially bore the stamp of their social realism and was aligned with traditional landscape painting. Fellow students, such as Henry Heerup, Richard Mortensen, Ejler Bille and Sonja Ferlov, introduced him to Modernism, however, and his style swiftly evolved from naturalistic to expressionistic by way of Surrealism.

Jacobsen's fascination for the international art scene drew him to Paris in the winter of 1934 where he visited numerous museums and exhibitions and was captivated by the work of Pablo Picasso. More so even than the discovery of tribal masks, it was Picasso's direct and spontaneous brushwork that came as a revelation to the Dane, who began to paint with increasing freedom and rhythm. He wanted, he said, to surpass the German Expressionists in material and colour.

After returning to Denmark, Jacobsen retreated to his small studio, where he assimilated his Parisian influences in a series of self-portraits. Driven by his free painting technique, these evolved around 1935 into the grinning, biting masks that typified his work from then on. His increasingly spontaneous execution was accompanied by a complete surrender to the imagination, inspired by tribal art from Oceania, Danish folk art and Scandinavian myths.

When Jacobsen joined the Linien [The Line] group in 1937, together with Asger Jorn and Carl-Henning Pedersen, and showed his masks at the group's international *Autumn Art Exhibition* in Copenhagen, they sent a

shockwave through the Danish art world. His fellow artists considered his work to be ground-breaking and greeted it with immense enthusiasm at a time when most of them were still searching for their own abstract style. Jacobsen had found the answer, facilitating the breakthrough of a specifically Danish modern idiom, characterised by spontaneity and an affinity with primal images.

On an ideological level, Jacobsen belonged firmly to the left. He joined the Communist Party in 1933 and was shocked and distressed when Germany annexed Austria and invaded Czechoslovakia, which inspired Jacobsen to create his masterpiece *Ophobning* [Accumulation]. With its sombre use of colour, powerful lines and copious dripping, it was a high point in Jacobsen's expressive, free style and a response to Picasso's *Guernica*, which he probably saw at a touring exhibition. Through the work's dramatic colours and forms, he sought to represent the struggle and emotions of a humanity dreaming of liberty and revolution in an oppressive environment of coercion and darkness. The work was an important inspiration to the members of Linien and Jacobsen's contemporaries.

In 1938, the artist joined the exhibition society Høst [Harvest], before moving on to Grønningen [The Green] in 1942, although this did not prevent him from co-signing Høst's influential manifesto in 1945. His numerous articles in the journal *Helhesten* during those years expressed his vision of art.

Jacobsen was an active member of the Resistance during the German occupation. After the war, he was one of several Danish artists to represent his country at the Venice Biennale (1948) and he also took part in the first Cobra exhibition. He felt little need to engage with the wider artistic world, which explains the limited international attention that his oeuvre received, in contrast with the widespread interest and appreciation in his own country. This led to a career as a teacher at the Royal Danish Academy of Art in Copenhagen (1959–1973). Many Danes consider him the most important exponent of Danish experimental art.

Asger Jorn [Asger Oluf Jørgensen]

Denmark
3 March 1914
11 May 1973

Jorn was one of the six signatories of Cobra's founding document and the inspiration for the movement, along with Dotremont. It would also be the same two who, while convalescing at the sanatorium in Silkeborg, eventually decided to disband the movement. Jorn in particular, as a fervent and committed networker, brought the group together. The powerful expression of his work made him the most authentic artist among the motley Cobra crew.

Jorn took part in virtually all the significant Cobra events, many of which he initiated himself. He organised the Cobra conference in Bregnerød, Denmark, and provided the copy for the first issue of the journal *Cobra*. Like Dotremont and Constant, he engaged in art theory, publishing on both the experimental in art and on primitive expression. His museum in Silkeborg became the Mecca of Cobra art and ensured that the movement secured a recognised place in the collective memory of the avant-garde.

— Asger Jorn grew up in a deeply Protestant family, yet from an early age he resisted Christian influences in society and authority in general. He was a rebel, with an aversion to compromise and bourgeois respectability. When a travelling exhibition of Danish artists visited Silkeborg in 1932, Jorn was captivated by modern Expressionism. He had recently completed his teacher training and took private art lessons from the painter Martin Kaalund-Jørgensen, swiftly becoming acquainted with Dada, Surrealism and Bauhaus. In 1936, Jorn bought himself a motorcycle and headed off to Paris. He wanted to study under Wassily Kandinsky but ended up enrolling at Fernand Léger's Académie contemporaine. He also worked for Le Corbusier, but the milieu's strict discipline and rationalist ethos was not to his taste, and he soon left. Having returned to Denmark, Jorn learnt etching and lithography at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen. He was impressed by Paul Klee and Joan Miró and switched from figurative to abstract art. Yet he also developed a fascination for the spontaneous, irrational work of Egil Jacobsen.

When the Germans occupied Denmark, the pacifist Jorn found himself in a profound crisis. He became an active Communist and contributed to the Party's underground journal *Land og Folk* [Land and People] and the archi-

tecture journal *A5*. Together with the writer and architect Robert Dahlmann Olsen, he founded the underground art group Helhesten [Hel's Horse] and the journal of the same name, in which he published the essay 'Intimate Banalities' (1941). Like almost all the Danish artists who would later become part of Cobra, he joined Linien [The Line] and the exhibition group Høst [Harvest] (1942–50).

In 1946, Jorn met the Dutch artist Constant and his wife Matie at an exhibition of work by Joan Miró at Galerie Pierre in Paris. They became friends and corresponded intensively. Two years later, Jorn had his first one-man exhibition at Galerie Breteau in Paris. He met Dotremont in 1947 at the first Conférence Internationale du Surréalisme révolutionnaire. Dissatisfaction with the course of events at the conference prompted Jorn, Dotremont, Constant and their companions to set up Cobra.

Jorn embarked on an affair with Constant's wife Matie, which poisoned the atmosphere between the Cobra members. The Dutch contingent did not even show up at the Cobra conference in Bregnerød, which Jorn organised. In 1951, he and Matie moved to Paris, where they lived in great poverty. Malnourished, weakened and suffering from tuberculosis, the artist was admitted to the Silkeborg sanatorium, which also marked the end of Cobra.

Jorn nevertheless continued his artistic and theoretical activities unabated. He experimented with ceramics in an improvised workshop, and in addition to poems, he wrote the first version of his book on experimental aesthetics, *Held og Hasard* [Salvation and Chance]. In October 1953, he stayed in a sanatorium in Switzerland where, after a long period of isolation, he began to correspond with other artists again and took part in the Danish art movement Spiralen. He swapped ideas with Enrico Baj, who was also a member. Together they founded the Mouvement International pour un Bauhaus Imaginiste (MIBI, 1953–1957) as a reaction against the 'new' Bauhaus (Hochschule für Gestaltung), founded by the Swiss Max Bill, which wished to concentrate on technical instruction and rejected painting. Jorn found this unacceptable.

In the spring of 1954, Jorn and his family settled in Albisola in northern Italy, yearning for the satisfaction he had enjoyed in the past

from working with other artists. This led him to organise, under the aegis of the MIBI, a summer meeting for experimental artists. Many ex-Cobra members, among them Appel and Cornille, attended these Rencontres internationales de la céramique, which proved such a success that Jorn organised a further instalment the following year.

As of 1955, Jorn spent his winters in Paris where he had found a studio with Alechinsky's help, and summers in his beloved Albisola. Together with the painter and chemist Pinot Gallizio and the painter and philosopher Piero Simondo, he created the 'Premier Laboratoire expérimental du MIBI' in the small Italian town of Alba, where all sorts of materials were tested for their creative utility. The MIBI also had a journal: *Eristica*.

It was in this same period that Jorn got to know Guy Debord, leader of the French avant-garde group the Internationale Lettriste (IL). The pair collaborated on two books: *Fin de Copenhague* (1957) and *Mémoires* (1959). The alliance between the IL and the MIBI was clinched at the Premier Congrès mondial des Artistes libres in September 1956. The result was the avant-garde Situationist International, or SI for short (1957–72), the members of which pursued a unitary urbanism. They wanted to create a new cityscape by means of architecture and, in so doing, to abolish all dividing lines between art and life. Jorn's ideas in this regard were collected in 1958 in the publication *Pour la forme. Ébauche d'une méthodologie des arts* [For the Sake of Form: Sketch of a Methodology of the Arts].

Jorn also remained artistically active throughout these years. In 1957, for example, he painted his largest-ever canvas, which he partly reworked several times and finally christened *Stalingrad* in 1960. He made a ceramic wall relief in Albisola measuring 27 metres in length and three in height for the state grammar school in the Danish city of Aarhus, and he and Pierre Wemaëre also designed a tapestry, *Le Long Voyage* [The Long Journey] for the same school. Jorn regularly bought traditional landscape paintings at flea markets, which he then painted over, experimenting in them with spontaneous lines and abstract, semifigurative subjects.

From the early 1960s, Jorn's work began to receive international attention, resulting in



several exhibitions in Europe and the United States. In 1962, he began his last major project in Silkeborg: the Skandinavisk Institut for Sammenlignende Vandalisme [Scandinavian Institute for Comparative Vandalism] (SISV). The centre lasted for four years and was devoted primarily to the study of early Nordic art.

After 1966, Jorn concentrated exclusively on oil paintings and travelled to Cuba, Scotland and other countries, including various destinations in Asia. In the meantime, however, his health was not improving. He was hospitalised with lung cancer in January 1973 and died less than six months later. His final resting place is in Gröttingbo, Gotland. The Jorn Museum in Silkeborg and the Casa Museo Jorn in Albisola remain as impressive testimony to his multi-faceted creativity.

Lucebert [Lubertus Jacobus Swaanswijk]

Netherlands
15 September 1924
10 May 1994

Lucebert's involvement with Cobra came after he joined the Experimentele Groep in Holland [Experimental Group in Holland] as a poet, alongside Gerrit Kouwenaar. While he was only briefly affiliated with Cobra, it was a period that would have an immense influence on his further artistic development.

One of his first experimental poems was published in the fourth issue of *Cobra*, which appeared in November 1949. In 1950, he also began to draw and paint intensively, but never took part in a Cobra exhibition as a painter. He was, however, given charge of the poetry evening held during the large-scale Cobra exhibition (1949) at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, taking his place alongside other experimental poets in the so-called 'Poets Cage'. A legendary photograph of the now infamous poetry evening has survived. Lucebert delivered a short opening

address, following which Dotremont gave a lecture in French. The audience only half understood what was being said and took offence at what sounded to them like Soviet propaganda. During the ensuing uproar, Lucebert asked Dotremont to end his speech in the name of Party discipline and urged him to calm down. A fistfight broke out instead and the hall eventually had to be cleared.

Lucebert distanced himself from Cobra and the Experimentele Groep in Holland after the incident, feeling that as a writer he had been let down by the group's plastic artists. He continued to serve, nevertheless, as the link between the Dutch literary movement De Vijftigers [Those of the Fifties] and Cobra.

— Lucebert was born in the working-class Jordaan district of Amsterdam, the second son of a self-employed house and sign painter. From an early age he spent his time writing poems. A housefront mural led to a bursary that enabled him to study drawing and painting for six months at the Instituut voor Kunstnijverheidsonderwijs in Amsterdam. Through the institute's director, Mart Stam, he came into contact with Dada and Surrealism.

Wim Hazeu's biography *Lucebert*, published in 2018, reveals that this much-admired artist fell under the spell of National Socialism during the Second World War. Years of in-depth research and comments in hitherto unknown letters from the war years leave no room for doubt that this was indeed the case. Lucebert distanced himself from such views after the Liberation, leaving home after quarrelling with his parents. He wanted to be an artist, lived a nomadic life and supported himself through odd jobs. He occasionally worked in exchange for board and lodging, which is how the murals for the Franciscan monastery in Heemskerk came about. In 1947, Lucebert made the acquaintance of the poets Jan



COLOPHON

Cobra – A Pictorial and Poetic Revolution

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and Kristin Van Passel

Cover image:

Karel Appel

Carnaval [Carnival], 1951

Acrylic and poster paint,

graphite, Indian ink,

oil pastel, walnut stain

and paper on paper,

1425 × 924 mm

The Phoebus Foundation,

Antwerp

[detail]

Karel Appel © SABAM

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Image page 2:

Constant

Kinderkrijg

[Head of a Child], 1949

Oil on canvas,

20.5 × 60.5 cm

The Phoebus Foundation,

Antwerp