

GALLERIA POGGIALI

Karel Appel
Toscana

04.05.2024 – 01.09.2024

Opening Saturday 04.05.2024

from 6 pm to 9 pm

Galleria Poggiali – Florence
Via della Scala 35, Florence
Via Benedetta 3, Florence

Galleria Poggiali is delighted to present ***Toscana*** the first solo show with the gallery by the Dutch artist Karel Appel (1921-2006), produced for the first time in Italy through close collaboration with the Karel Appel Foundation of Amsterdam. The exhibition opens on Saturday 4 May 2024 at 6 pm in the gallery's premises in Via della Scala and Via Benedetta in Florence.

Karel Appel, founder of the CoBrA group (an acronym made up of the initial letters of the cities of origin of the various members), is recognised by the leading museum institutions as a crucial figure on the international artistic scene.

This broad and structured display project is based on a series of works produced by the artist during his stay in Villa Licia, the residence close to Mercatale Val di Pesa in Tuscany which he frequented between 1988 and 2000. The exhibition casts light on the works executed in this period through an original rereading by Helmut Friedel, former director of the Lenbachhouse in Munich, who explains,

'These are large-scale works in which the hilly landscape is portrayed in all its majesty and vastness so as to offer the spectator a close-up vision of the branches of the shrubs and the foliage of the trees: they include works called *Horizon of Tuscany* (1995), *Birth of a Landscape* (1996) or simply *Nature* (1994), *Study of Trees* (1996). Alongside them the artist has created assemblages, sculptural works in which he uses 'found objects' discovered in Tuscany that he has painted or transformed into bronze casts.'

Over thirty works, including large paintings on canvas and paper as well as sculptures, brought together for the first time in Italy, illustrate the selected subjects and the variety of different media employed by the artist during his Tuscan sojourn. The exhibition is offered to the public as an original dialogue capable of reforging the links and underscoring the influences of the typical landscape of the region, identifying it as a fundamental part of the work of one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century.

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Man and nature are one and the same. The tree and man himself are a single thing. If we destroy nature, we destroy ourselves. This is . . . what gave rise to the idea of painting nature, landscape, as if it were a face. I show the colours of nature and then I add the face. (K. Appel)

Friedel indeed notes that 'by replacing the word "nature" with "landscape" and the word "man" with "body" we arrive at what are the two chief possibilities of figurative representation: on the one hand, that which uses a two-dimensional, horizontal surface to portray recumbent landscapes and, on the other, that which employs an erect, corporeal figure to model the human body in space.'

More specifically, the dialogue between the monumental works displayed in the show, *Lying Nude no.2* (1986) – over four metres in width – *Horizon of Tuscany* (1990) or *Running Through a Landscape (Tuscan Series)* (1990) – over three metres – reflects the conception of landscape and man as two inseparable parts of a whole.

Appel explored this particular notion of landscape in the ballet *Can We Dance a Landscape?* (1987), produced in collaboration with the dancer and choreographer Min Tanaka and the composer Dao, and staged first at the Opéra Comique in Paris and later in the same year in Brooklyn and Amsterdam. This was an important experience that further expanded Appel's artistic spectrum, enriching it with a new means of expression that could enhance the element of dynamism and temporal transience that played such a crucial role in his painting from the very start.

Deux têtes (1959), displayed in the Via Benedetta premises, instead represents the origin of Appel's painting. The artist's gesture, which is still present in the matter as if it were alive, confirms the relevance and the inexhaustible power of his painting and provides – like a direct bridge – an immediate comparison with which to grasp the point of departure and that of arrival of the rest of the corpus of more recent works. The 1950s were indeed the time of Appel's international consecration, of his first solo show at the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, of the Venice Biennale and of his inclusion in the group show at the Guggenheim Museum. Dating more specifically to 1959 were the group show *Vitalità Nell'Arte* at Palazzo Grassi, a co-production with the Kunsthalle Recklinghausen and the Stedelijk Museum of Amsterdam, his participation at Documenta II in Kassel, and the international prize for painting at the fifth Biennale of San Paolo in Brazil.

The show is accompanied by a book with critical essay Helmut Friedel, a contribution by Franz W. Kaiser, director of the Appel Foundation, on the artist's relation with Italy and an original conversation of his with the artist's wife, Harriet Appel.

Date: 4 May 2024

Time: 6 pm

Place: Galleria Poggiali, Florence

For further information about the exhibition and the artist, please contact Galleria Poggiali Firenze
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