

KAREL APPEL

WORKS ON PAPER



SIEVEKING
VERLAG

KAREL APPEL

WORKS ON PAPER

EDITED BY JONAS STORSVE

SIEVEKING
VERLAG

INTRODUCTION

JONAS STORSVE

The name of the Dutch artist Karel Appel is intimately linked to the activities of the Cobra group, whose lifespan, while admittedly brief, left a decisive mark on European art in the years immediately following World War II. At once international and communal, the movement was founded in Paris in November 1948 and self-dissolved after the *International Exhibition of Experimental Art* in Liège held in October and November 1951. Its Belgian, Danish, and Dutch members were among the most significant European artists of their time, but Karel Appel was more than that: he soon dropped the Cobra vocabulary and forged a style—or rather *styles*—of his own, endlessly evolving and experimenting with forms and materials throughout a career that lasted more than sixty years.

The art world is capricious and its memory very short. After decades as a leading figure on the art scene, Appel is now a relative unknown, little remembered outside the Netherlands. Interest in his deeply humanist, overtly Expressionist art revived in the eighties, when the Jungen Wilden and other neo-Fauvists were having their moment of glory, but now, in 2015, a Karel Appel exhibition is a rare event indeed: the last major presentation in France goes back to 1987, when different aspects of his work were shown in Toulouse and Nice. Things may be changing, though: a new generation of collectors, gallerists, and art historians is currently bringing a fresh eye to postwar art, and a closer look at one of the greatest European artists of the latter part of the twentieth century once again seems feasible. This is precisely what we intend to do in this retrospective of Appel's works on paper. Doubtlessly, this is the least-known facet of his oeuvre, but certainly not the least interesting. This exhibition of eighty-four works, most being shown for the first time, covers Appel's entire career: the earliest dates from 1947 and the most recent from 2006, the year of his death. All of them have been provided by the foundation that handles his work, the Karel Appel Foundation.

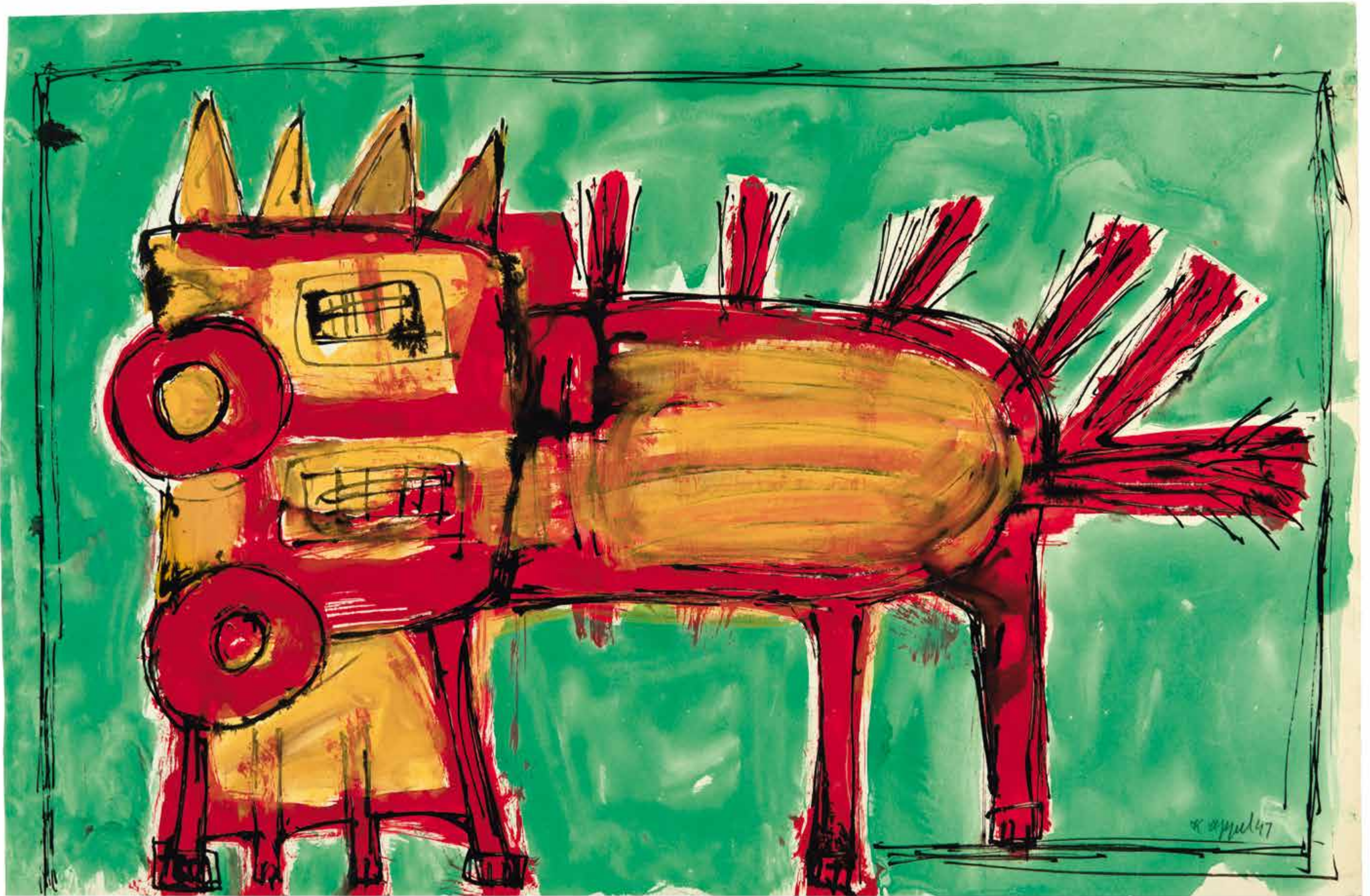
Barely twenty, Appel began studying at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam during the German occupation. Over time, contact with the collective approach of the Cobra group and with Danish fellow artists, all older and more experienced than he was, helped him to develop artistically. After the ill-fated commission for a mural at Amsterdam City Hall—it was hidden from view shortly after he finished it—Appel moved to Paris in 1950. There he met art critic and Cobra defender Michel Ragon, who organized the group's first exhibition at Librairie 73 and would publish *the* work of reference on Appel's art in 1988. More crucial still was the meeting with Michel Tapié, advocate of an *art autre* (art of another kind) with which Appel vigorously identified. It was thanks to Tapié that he found himself showing alongside Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, Jean Dubuffet, and Wols at Galerie Nina Dausset in Paris, followed by his first solo exhibition in the United States, at the Martha Jackson Gallery in 1954. Well in advance of Asger Jorn, Appel was the first ex-Cobra artist to find a place on the international scene. His painterly language remained profoundly European, but the American experience had its repercussions in his work. Inspired by jazz, he painted portraits of greats including Miles Davis, Dizzy Gillespie, and Sarah Vaughan. During the same period he was working extensively with architects, and some forty, often monumental works saw him testing out such new media as glass, textiles, and ceramics. After a decade of endless travel, in 1964 Appel bought the Château de Molesmes, near Auxerre, where he began working on polychrome sculpture. He moved to Paris again, then to Tuscany, dividing his time between Europe and America, constantly traveling, experimenting, and renewing his approach. And even if he never returned to his homeland permanently, Holland's major art institutions remained faithful to him and have continued to present his work. Appel died in Zurich, but was buried at Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris, the city that had meant so much to him in his early years.



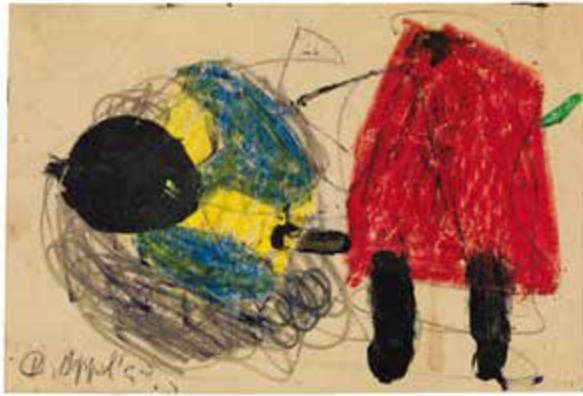
Untitled, 1948 · Cat. 28



Kat (Cat), 1948 · Cat. 27

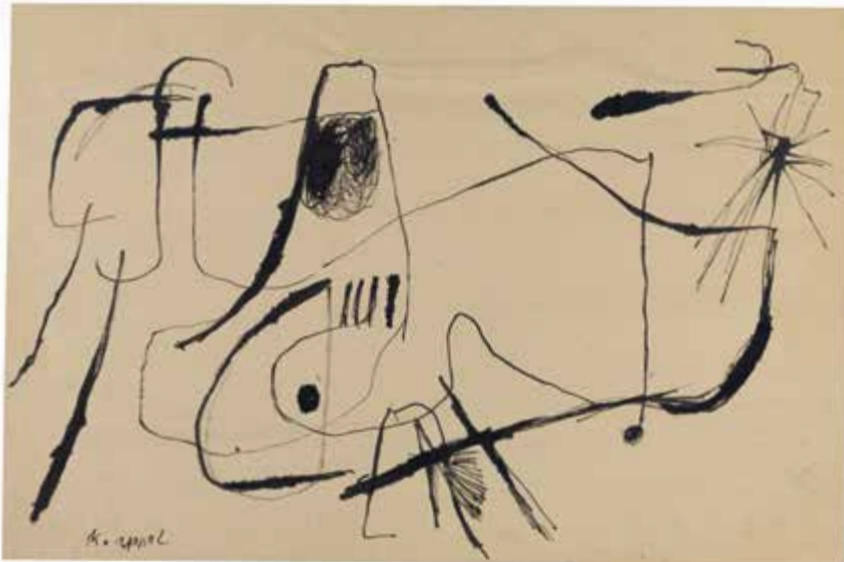
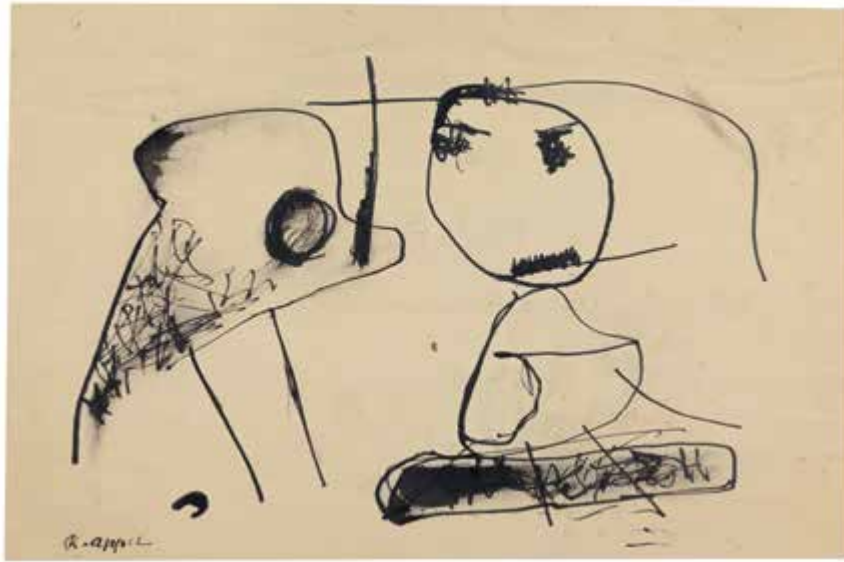


Untitled, 1947 · Cat. 2



Untitled, 1950 · Cat. 43
Untitled, 1950 · Cat. 45
Untitled, 1950 · Cat. 50

Personage, 1947 · Cat. 3



Untitled, 1948 · Cat. 24
Untitled, 1948 · Cat. 25
Untitled, 1948 · Cat. 26



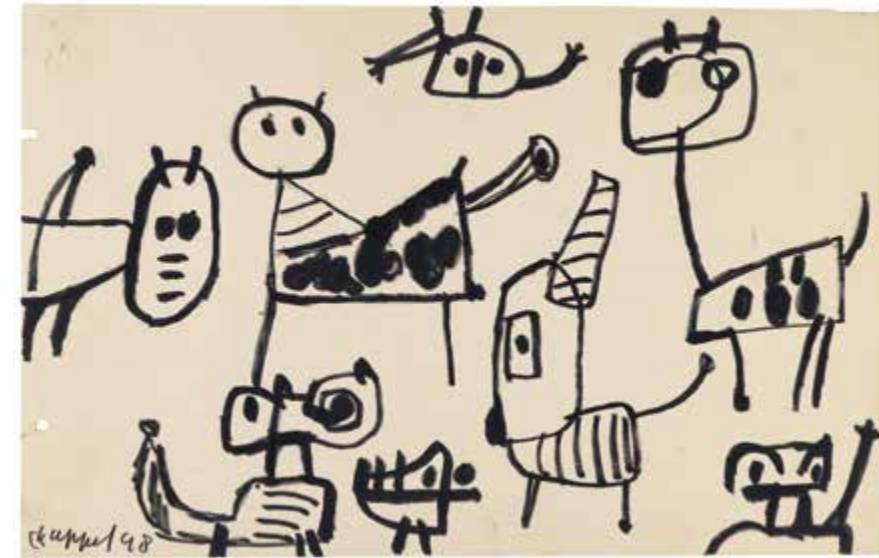
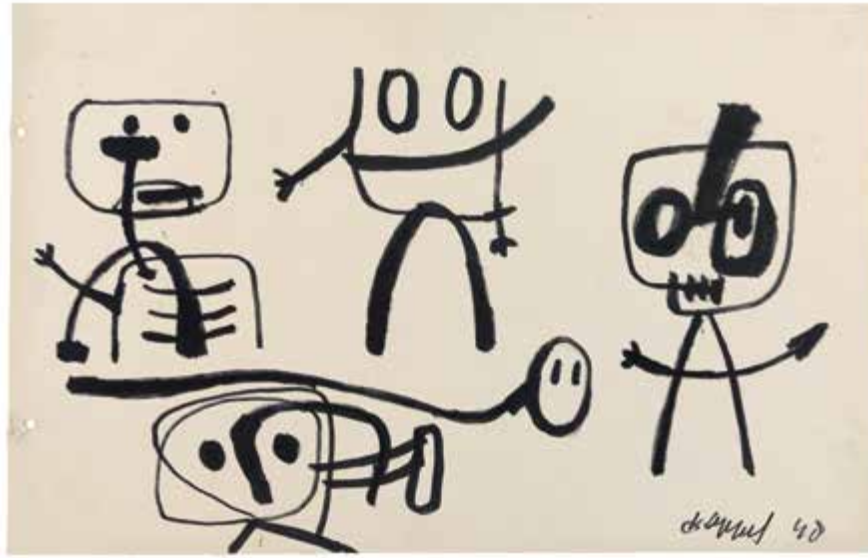
Ruimte wezens no. 2 (Creatures from Outer Space no. 2), 1948 · Cat. 31



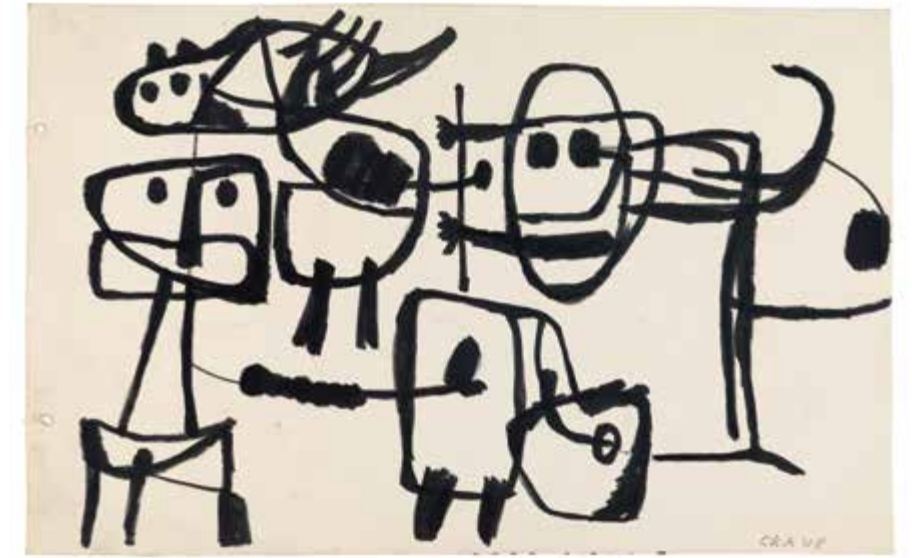
Untitled, 1949 · Cat. 42



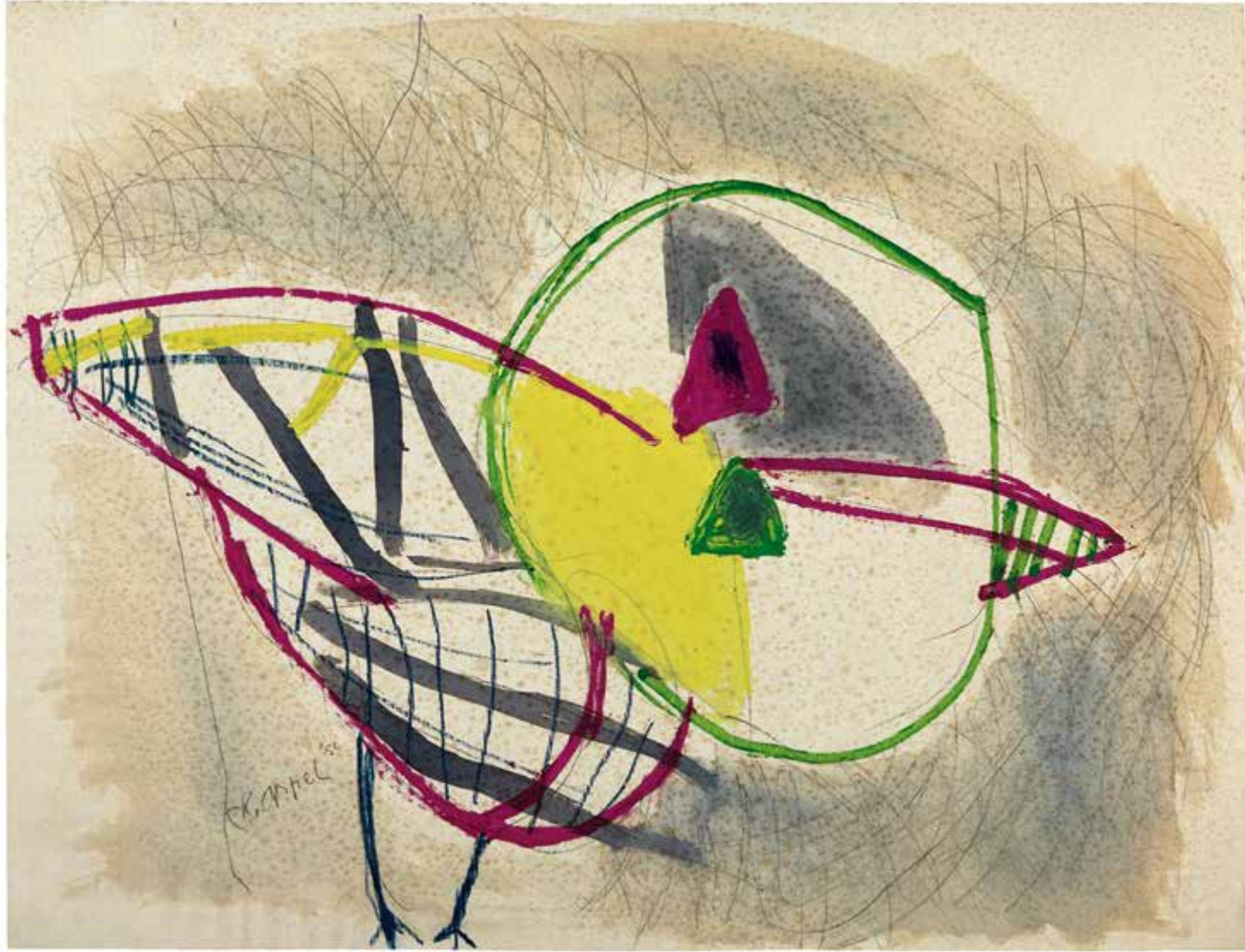
De geit (The Goat), 1949 · Cat. 41



Untitled, 1948 · Cat. 16
Dierentuin (Menagerie), 1948 · Cat. 18



Compositie met hoofden (Composition with Heads), 1948 · Cat. 30
Untitled, 1948 · Cat. 21



Animal no. 12, 1951 · Cat. 53



Animal no. 13, 1951 · Cat. 54



Untitled, 1961 · Cat. 64



Untitled, 1961 · Cat. 63



Man and Animal no. 1, 1994 · Cat. 76



Man and Animal no. 2, 1994 · Cat. 77

CHRONOLOGY

FRANZ W. KAISER

With the assistance of Antonien Rijkse and Christin Deller of the Karel Appel Foundation



1



2



3

- 1 Karel Appel, 1945
- 2 Constant, Appel, and Corneille at their exhibition at Kunsthandel Santee Landweer N.V., Amsterdam, February 1948
- 3 Karel Appel painting the mural *Vragende Kinderen* in the cafeteria of Amsterdam's city hall, 1949

1921

Christiaan Karel Appel is born on April 25 in Amsterdam at Dapperstraat 7, as the second son of four to Jan Appel and his wife Jo (born Chevalier, descendant from a French Huguenot family). Jan Appel runs a barbershop in the busy folk neighborhood of the city.

Three years after the end of World War I, large parts of southern Belgium and northern France are still devastated. The Netherlands, having been neutral, is not as affected as the surrounding countries.

Thirties

Appel works as an apprentice in his father's barbershop. For his fifteenth birthday, he is given a box with oil paint and an easel by his mother's eldest brother, Karel Chevalier, a commendable amateur painter. He receives painting lessons from his uncle; they make drawings while exploring the surroundings of Amsterdam. Upon realizing that his nephew cannot learn more from him, the uncle takes Karel to his own instructor, the painter and teacher of amateurs Jozef Verheijen, where the teenager learns the craft. He makes his first and somewhat isolated sculpture in 1936.

The world economic crisis (1929); in Germany this period is soon followed by Hitler's *Machtergreifung* or advent to power (1933), characterized by an oppression of political enemies, avant-garde art (the degenerate art exhibition *Entartete Kunst*, 1937–41), fringe groups, and Jews (Reichskristallnacht, 1938).

At the World Exhibition in Paris (1937), the monumental pavilions of Germany and the USSR are facing each other; the pavilion of the Spanish Republic shows Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* and works by Alexander Calder and Julio González. Asger Jorn, who has studied with Fernand Léger in Paris, assists Le Corbusier with the decoration of the Pavillon de l'Esprit Nouveau (Pavilion of the New Spirit).

1939

Appel leaves his father's barbershop and his family home and moves into his first studio at Zwanenburgwal 42 (today 72–82), the address of the anarchist Henk Eikeboom; a long period of precarious life begins.

Soviet-German non-aggression pact; Germany attacks Poland; World War II begins; the Red Army invades eastern Poland and attacks Finland.

1940–41

His aim is to gain admission to the Amsterdam Rijksakademie voor Beeldende Kunst (Royal Academy of Fine Art), not only because he wants to become an artist, but also because the certificate of admission is respected by the Germans, protecting Appel from being compelled to do forced labor. He fails his first entrance examination in 1941; continues portrait lessons with Verheijen and travels all over the Netherlands to draw landscapes and to earn some money with portraits of farmers.

Germany occupies Denmark and Norway and invades the Netherlands and Belgium, then France. Truce of Compiègne: France is divided into an occupied and an unoccupied area. Germany declares war on and attacks the USSR in mid-1941. Asger Jorn, who has returned to Denmark because of the war, starts the avant-garde magazine *Helhesten* (The Hell-Horse). The first issue opens with a commemorative article on the recently deceased Paul Klee.

1942–43

Earns admission to the Rijksakademie upon his second try, in June 1942, and meets Corneille there. They become close friends—a friendship that will last for about nine years, during which time they discover modern art together. Corneille introduces Appel to modern Dutch poetry. Appel spends a lot of time in the academy's library, where he reads Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* and Lautréamont's *Les chants de Maldoror* (The Songs of Maldoror), the latter being an important reference for Surrealism. His favorite book is Multatuli's *Max Havelaar* (1860).

The German campaign in Russia is successful at first but then gets bogged down in Stalingrad. German authorities in Paris shut down a Kandinsky exhibition at Galerie Jeanne Bucher. Most Parisian galleries of modern art refrain from showing international modern art. An exhibition of Arno Breker, Hitler's preferred sculptor, is staged at the Musée de l'Orangerie. Also, in the Netherlands information about the rest of the world and contemporary art is scarce due to the war and the occupation.

1944

The relative protection granted by student certificates fades away; suspected of having sheltered individuals wanting to escape forced labor, Appel comes under the radar of the police. In the late summer of 1944, Corneille and Appel go into hiding in a boat on the river Vecht (near Utrecht). Two months later they come back to Amsterdam—and soon Appel disappears into the country. Even Corneille loses contact.