

Museum Guide

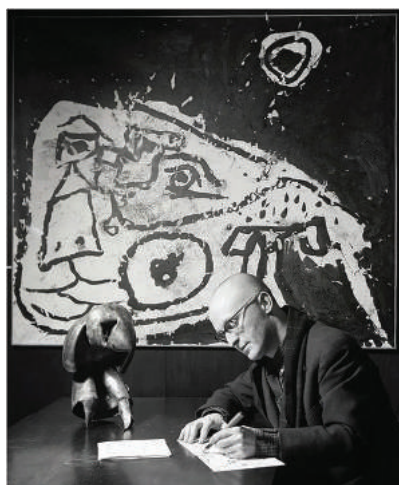
**NSU ART
MUSEUM**
FORT LAUDERDALE

NSU
Florida
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY



CONFRONTATION:

Keith Haring & Pierre Alechinsky
February 27 - October 2, 2022



All Rights Reserved
Essay by Ariella Wolens copyright NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale

Cover photography credit:
Keith Haring at AREA Club 1985. Photo: © Ben Buchanan
Pierre Alechinsky at the front desk of Lefebvre Gallery, New York, 1962.
Photo by John Lefebvre, Courtesy Lefebvre Gallery Archives.

All artwork reproduced is by Pierre Alechinsky and Keith Haring unless otherwise noted.

All artwork by Pierre Alechinsky © Pierre Alechinsky
All artwork by Keith Haring © The Keith Haring Foundation

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 – INTRODUCTION

03 – ABOUT ALECHINSKY

08 – “COBRA? MY SCHOOL”

10 – A DAY AT THE MUSEUM

12 – THE PAPER BOYS / SUBWAY DRAWINGS

14 – HEADLINES

16 – MODIFICATIONS

18 – HUMAN ANIMALS

24 – FOUR HANDED PAINTINGS

26 – MORTALITY & LEGACY

28 – SACRED IMAGES

29 – FOR JAMES ENSOR

32 – “CONFRONTATION” BY PIERRE ALECHINSKY

34 – TIMELINE

INTRODUCTION



Installation view, *Confrontation: Keith Haring & Pierre Alechinsky*, 2022 at NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale. Photo by Steven Brooke.

This exhibition explores the historic and visual intersections between American street artist and activist Keith Haring (b. 1958, Reading, PA; d. 1990, New York, NY) and the Belgian painter, Pierre Alechinsky (b. 1927, Brussels, Belgium; lives and works in Bougival, France), the last surviving member of the European avant-garde art movement, CoBrA.

In 1977, while studying at the Ivy School of Professional Art in Pittsburgh, a then 19 year-old Keith Haring visited the Museum of Art at the Carnegie Institute, where he encountered a major retrospective of the artist Pierre Alechinsky. Throughout Haring's career, he would credit this experience as being a watershed moment for him as an artist. In interviews, Haring repeatedly described the sudden "rush of confidence" he had when he saw Alechinsky's self-generating shapes and framing devices that were so similar to his own, but which he had never realized on a monumental scale.

Alechinsky's expressive and spontaneous lines thrilled Haring, who returned to the exhibition multiple times, studied the catalogue, read the artist's writings, and watched films of him painting enormous works on the floor. Following this revelatory moment, Haring started working bigger, painting horizontally and incorporating spontaneous drips into his compositions. While the young artist adopted a controlled line that was less fluid than Alechinsky's, Haring was assured that he was "doing something that was worthwhile". The inspiration that Haring derived from Alechinsky early in his practice remained a constant throughout his life, and lead to a direct meeting between the two artists at Alechinsky's studio in Bougival, France, on November 4, 1984.

This exhibition positions Keith Haring within a historical lineage that extends beyond the conventional categorization of him as an American artist, whose distinct work descended solely from Pop Art and New York City's graffiti subculture. In connecting Haring to Alechinsky, and subsequently, to CoBrA, this presentation emphasizes the under-recognized legacy of this key experimental European avant-garde movement in America. Alechinsky and his CoBrA compatriots set a precedent for Haring and his contemporaries in their fierce erosion of artistic and social barriers, through which they embraced joyful collaboration and championed non-traditional creative sources as a way to instigate social change.

NSU Art Museum's collection of CoBrA-related art is the largest within any American museum. CoBrA—an acronym for the three capital cities from which its founding members originated: Copenhagen (Denmark), Brussels (Belgium), and Amsterdam (the Netherlands)—is the international, interdisciplinary, collective art movement that spanned from 1948 to 1951.

Confrontation: Keith Haring & Pierre Alechinsky is curated by Ariella Wolens, Bryant-Taylor Curator, with Bonnie Clearwater, Director and Chief Curator of NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale. This exhibition is made possible with major support from Dr. David & Linda Frankel, with additional funding from Christie's, Linda Nathan Marks & Berenice Fisher, Stephen & Joan Marks, Jacqueline Niehaus, and Lee Sider & Gregory Stanton.

ABOUT ALECHINSKY

Pierre Alechinsky was born in Brussels, Belgium in 1927, between the two world wars. His father was a naturalized Belgian of Russian-Jewish descent, while his mother was of Walloon (French speaking Southern Belgian) heritage. Pierre Alechinsky's formative years were shaped by the horrors of World War II, which he experienced under the barbaric rule of Nazi occupation.

As a child, Alechinsky instinctively wrote and drew with his left hand, which at the time was considered a handicap. His teachers insisted he learn to work against this inclination, but allowed him to continue to paint and draw with his left. As he wrote, "they left me it for drawing and other trifles". As a result, Alechinsky acquired an ambidextrous skill which led to an inimitable linear style, one that is simultaneously script-like and graphic.

Alechinsky's left handedness gave him a heightened awareness of how he held his tools, leading to a distinct understanding of composition. This results in his images often being legible from multiple perspectives. The artist's constant switching of hands and changing of direction also contributed to his interest in printing techniques, which he has described as causing, "so many hours looking into Alice's mirror where all that has been reversed is again set right." In 1978 - in a move possibly inspired by Alechinsky - Keith Haring tried to train himself to draw with his left hand, which he said made him, "much more aware, more involved with every movement".

The exhibition's inclusion of the painting, *L'esprit des chutes (Spirit of the Falls)*, 1978, was specially selected by Pierre Alechinsky, who noted the work's relation to his painting *Niagara Falls*, 1976, which Haring encountered at the Carnegie Institute. Both paintings reflect the impact of Alechinsky's visit to Japan in 1955, at the recommendation of artist Walshe Ting (b. 1928, Wuxi, China, d. 2010, New York, NY).

His time in Asia led Alechinsky to almost completely abandon the Western painting tradition of using oil paint and canvas surfaces. As an alternative, Ting taught Alechinsky a technique known as marouflage, in which a work on paper is affixed to canvas. This method provided Alechinsky with the freedom afforded to working on paper, while still ensuring his paintings maintained the aura and durability of a three dimensional work on canvas. Marouflage became a signature technique for Alechinsky, who later taught it to Haring upon their meeting in Bougival, France in 1984.



John Lefebvre, *Alechinsky à l'imprimerie Bramsen (Alechinsky at Bramsen Printing Workshop)*, 1983, NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale.



Pierre Alechinsky, *L'esprit des chutes (Spirit of the Falls)*, 1978, India ink on paper mounted on canvas, 75 1/2 in x 47 3/4 in / 191.7 cm x 121.2 cm

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks
©Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris; photograph
by Angelika Rinnhofer



Keith Haring
Untitled, 1983
Sumi ink on paper
38 in x 50 in / 96.5 cm x 127 cm

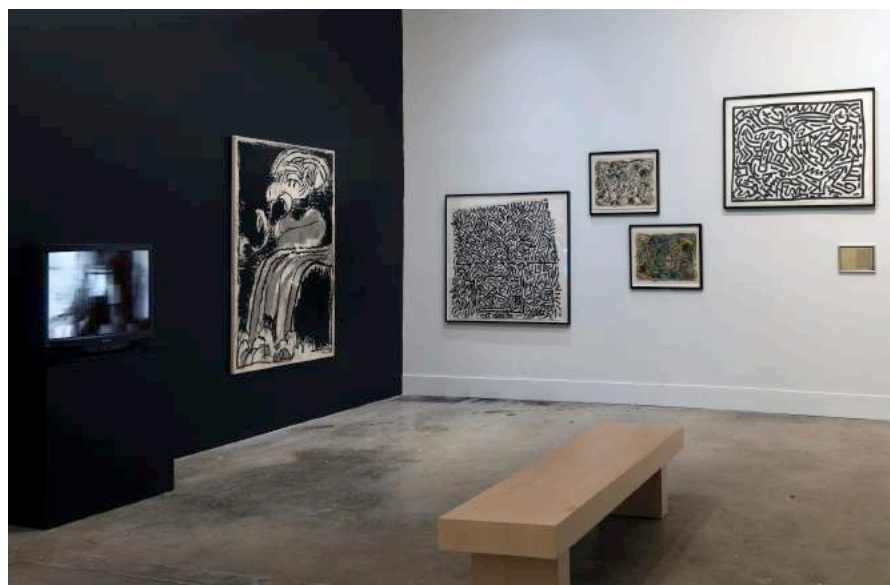
Courtesy of the Krauss Family Foundation
© Keith Haring Foundation



Pierre Alechinsky
Plan d'ensemble (Masterplan), 1964
Lithograph
E.A.

9 7/8 in x 25 7/8 in / 50.4 cm x 65.7 cm
Printer: Beaudet, Paris

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks
© Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris;
photograph by Angelika Rinnhofer



Installation views, *Confrontation: Keith Haring & Pierre Alechinsky, 2022* at NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale. Photo by Steven Brooke.

“COBRA? MY SCHOOL”

Pierre Alechinsky studied book illustration and typography at the École Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture et des Arts Décoratifs in Le Cambre, Brussels from 1944 to 1946. In March 1949, at the age of 22, he took a trip to Brussels and came across an exhibition titled, *Les Fins et Les Moyens (The Ends and the Means)* at the Palais des Beaux Arts. The show presented work by 43 CoBrA artists from seven countries, and it profoundly impacted Alechinsky, causing him to seek out the group's secrétaire général, Belgian artist Christian Dotremont (b. 1922, Tervuren, Belgium; d. 1979, Tervuren, Belgium). With his brimming enthusiasm, Alechinsky became the newest and youngest member of the budding group.

CoBrA had officially formed on November 8, 1948, when artists Karel Appel (b. 1921, Amsterdam, Netherlands; d. 2006, Zürich, Switzerland), Asger Jorn (b. 1914, Jutland, Denmark; d. 1973 Aarhus, Denmark), Constant Nieuwenhuys (b. 1920, Amsterdam, Netherlands; d. 2005, Utrecht, Netherlands), Corneille (b. 1922, Liège, Belgium; d. 2010, Auvers-sur-Oise, France), Joseph Noiret (b. 1927, Brussels, Belgium; d. 2012, Brussels, Belgium) and Christian Dotremont came together in rejection of what they felt to be the overly formal and dogmatic ideology of Surrealism, the dominant avant-garde movement of the time. Together, at the café of the Hotel Notre Dame, they wrote a manifesto titled, *La cause était entendue (The Matter Was Settled)*, in which they emphasized the importance of spontaneity, experimentation, community and material engagement.



CoBrA artists bringing their work to the *International Exhibition of Experimental Artists*, Stedelijk, Amsterdam, November 1949.

From left to right: Anton Rooskens, passer-by, Stephen Gilbert, Theo Wolvecamp, Eugène Brands, Karl-Otto Götz, Corneille, Jacques Doucet, Pierre Alechinsky (with his painting, *Les mariés (The Newlyweds)*, Tonie Sluyter, Lucebert, Jan Elburg, Shinkichi Tajiri, Gerrit Kouwenaar, Constant, Karel Appel and Victor Nieuwenhuys (with the painting *Masker (Mask)*, 1949, by his father Constant). Photo by Mrs. E. Kokkorris-Syjiër.



Pierre Alechinsky
Dos ornés, têtes dorées (*Backs Adorned, Golden Heads*), 1973
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
45 1/2 in x 61 in / 115,5 cm x 154,9 cm

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks
© Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris;
photograph by Angelika Rinnohofer

A DAY AT THE MUSEUM



Installation views of Pierre Alechinsky's retrospective, 1977, Pittsburgh International Series, Carnegie Museum of Art, Courtesy of Carnegie Museum of Art, Permanent Collection and Archives.

At 19-years-old in 1977, Keith Haring was almost the same age Alechinsky had been when he encountered CoBrA. Alechinsky was now turning 50, had become an internationally renowned artist and was being honored as the first recipient of the Andrew W. Mellon Prize. The award was acknowledged with a major exhibition, the first of a single artist in the history of the Pittsburgh International Series (now known as the Carnegie International). When Alechinsky's show opened in Pittsburgh, Haring was studying at a nearby technical school. Outside of class, the aspiring artist would frequent museums and pour through art books borrowed from local libraries. It was in this curious fashion that Haring happened to walk into the Carnegie and came face to face with Pierre Alechinsky's retrospective. The show featured over 200 artworks, in which Haring saw reflections of his own burgeoning practice. This encounter gave the young artist the affirmation he needed to pursue his creative vision, one that would lead to the formation of one of the most distinctive and recognizable graphic styles of any artist known today.



Keith Haring, *Untitled*, 1977, Acrylic and graphite on paper, 48 in x 130 in / 121.92 cm x 330.2 cm, Collection of Kermit and Lisa Oswald, © Keith Haring Foundation

In this never-before exhibited artwork, we see Keith Haring grappling with his influences, attempting to forge his own artistic path. The work was made the same year as Alechinsky's Carnegie Institute exhibition, and according to Haring's lifelong friend and collaborator, Kermit Oswald, it was partially conceived in response to what Haring saw there. The impact of Alechinsky is detected in Haring's chosen medium: a sprawling expanse of paper, which in its crumpled and textured state becomes almost sculptural. We can determine by the footprints on the work that it was at least partially painted on the floor, echoing the Japanese process of calligraphy which greatly affected both artists. The frenetic, free-flowing line and variegated palettes show Haring replicating Alechinsky's rapid strokes and vibrant coloration, which he would later abandon in favor of his signature primary colors and bold, controlled line. Along with Alechinsky's impact, we may read signs of Jackson Pollock, Wassily Kandinsky, and Brion Gysin, all of whom Haring acknowledged as guiding forces in his art.

THE PAPER BOYS

Pierre Alechinsky largely abandoned the Western practice of painting with oil on canvas after traveling to Japan in 1955, subsequently embracing the use of ink and acrylic paint on paper. These tools retained the true gesture and immediacy of his brush strokes.

For both Haring and Alechinsky, their fast pace, improvisational style and grand compositional scale made paper the ideal medium. Beyond these material concerns, paper is infinitely cheaper and more easily transported than stretched canvases.

Beyond their love of making singular works on paper, both artists were masters of printmaking. For Alechinsky, his technical study of book illustration and ability to compose reverse imagery (consequent to having to learn to write backwards as a left-handed child) provided him with a firm footing in the print world.

Haring's education of printing techniques came during his time at the Arts and Crafts Center in Pittsburgh. Printmaking diversified the ways in which he could explore the potential uses of paper; it was also one of the main ways he made his art more financially accessible to the public. Like the CoBrA artists, Haring felt ambivalent about the art market, and believed that art was something all members of society should be able to create and enjoy, rather than being a commodity that was only available to an elite few.



Keith Haring
Untitled (falling angel and two dogs), 1984
Chalk on paper mounted on canvas
40 in x 30 in / 116.8 cm x 76.2cm

©Keith Haring Foundation

SUBWAY DRAWINGS

Keith Haring said his subway drawings were the most important thing he ever did. The series began in December 1980, when the artist noticed that before advertising posters in subway stations were replaced, there would be a moment when their stripped surface laid bare, ripe for clandestine creative explorations.

The Subway series may be considered Haring's first public artworks, jump-starting his life-long focus on community and public art. As with CoBrA, Haring emphasized the importance of making art accessible to all members of society.

Not only did the series lay the ground work for Haring's populist ideology, it was also the space in which he fully realized his controlled yet spontaneous style of drawing, and firmly established his iconic, truncated image vocabulary: radiant babies, barking dogs, UFOs, serpents and angels. Throughout the world, these images remain immediately recognizable as the work of Haring.



Pierre Alechinsky
Où êtes vous (Where Are You), 1988
Lithograph on thin rice paper
VI/XX E.A.
73 1/2 in x 37 1/2 in / 186.6 cm x 95.2 cm

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks
©Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris;
photograph by Angelika Rinnhofer

HEADLINES

Despite being generations apart, Alechinsky and Haring were both receptive to using paper for a number of the same reasons. Like many children in the 20th century, their introduction to art was through the comics section of their parents newspapers. For Alechinsky, this meant *The Adventures of Tintin*, while for Haring, it was Mickey Mouse.

The multi-paneled format of comic strips appear within Alechinsky's signature "marginal remarks" motif, in which rectangular panels with distinct, individual images frame a central picture. Similarly, Haring frequently employed comic strip framing and serialized narratives in his artworks.

Beyond the influence of cartoons, newspapers were fundamental to Haring's work throughout his career, a fact that his lifelong friend Kermit Oswald attributes to their experience working as young paperboys, which gave Haring an early, focused, exposure to front-page headlines. While much of Haring's work is untitled, it is often credited to the day, month and year. When comparing Haring's work with the headlines of the day, symbols and narratives frequently correlate.



Keith Haring, *Chernobyl*, April 26, 1986, Markerpen on newspaper, 11 7/8 in x 15 3/4 in / 30.2 cm x 40 cm, Nijkerk-Bogen Collection, ©Keith Haring Foundation



Pierre Alechinsky, *Factor Rhésus (Rhesus Factor)*, 1967, Copperplate color etching with marginal remarks, 21 in x 27 1/2 in / 53 cm x 69 cm, NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Crist Creona ©Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris; photograph by Angelika Rinnhofer

MODIFICATIONS

CoBrA artist Asger Jorn instilled in the group what he called “the value of banality”. Even kitsch and commercial culture had value, in that it reflected how art is encountered in everyday life. For Alechinsky, the everyday was inserted into his work through his decision to use found documents as the surface for his art making, a process that began in 1958 after he received a gift from Christian Dotremont of “beautiful old papers, with emblems to be decoded in transparency”. In this exhibition, newspapers, letters, bank securities and existing artworks serve as the support for both Alechinsky and Haring’s visual imaginings.

In *Sikkim*, Alechinsky’s hand-painted waves and creatures swarm over a military map of a land-locked Indian state located in the Himalayan mountains. In the artist’s hands, utilitarian diagrams transform into imaginative hordes, while lakes and rivers become eyes and other orifices. When working on found objects, painting, as Alechinsky wrote in 1951 in the CoBrA periodical, becomes “a terrain of experience.”



Pierre Alechinsky

Sikkim, 1981

Ink on air navigation chart

41 1/2 in x 57 1/4 in / 105.4 cm x 145.4 cm

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks
©Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris;
photograph by Angelika Rinnhofer



Pierre Alechinsky
Papiers Traités (Recycled Papers): Plate III, 1978
 Lithograph
 Ed. no. 14/99
 26 3/8 in x 20 1/2 in / 66.9 cm x 52.07 cm

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks
 ©Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris;
 photograph by Angelika Rinnhofer

HUMAN ANIMALS

CoBrA was born out of a group of artists' experience of the inhumanity of two world wars, and the struggle they felt to find freedom in its wake. This desire for liberty in life and art lead them to seek allegorical visions of existence beyond the human form. As the name of the movement indicates, animals were at the core of their strategy. Opening the figure to animal signifiers allowed them to convey both the innocence and monstrous potential of society, while giving space for playful and imaginative visions to flourish.

For Alechinsky, growing up in Belgium meant being immersed in the monstrous images that proliferated in the work of Flemish Old Masters like Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder, along with the macabre skeletal revelers in the paintings of James Ensor. These influences merged with those of Surrealism, the convictions of CoBrA, and the sinuous lines of Japanese calligraphy to form Alechinsky's singular visual interplays of monsters, specters, birds, snakes, and comical human figures.

In contrast to this pronounced historical lineage, Haring claimed to have subconsciously absorbed his visual influences, instinctively portraying his geometric figures as anthropomorphic beasts from an early age. His image lexicon largely consists of chimeras: humans with dog heads and serpentine limbs, nuclear hazard signs and computers in lieu of faces. Haring saw these human-animal-machines as symbols of a transfer of energy, inspired by the accelerated pace of technological advancement in the seventies and eighties.



Pierre Alechinsky
Poids plume (Featherweight), 1980
Acrylic on paper mounted on canvas
25 1/2 in x 20 1/4 in / 64.77 cm x 51.43 cm

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra
Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks
© Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights
Society (ARS), New York ADAGP, Paris;
photograph by Angelika Rinnhofer



Keith Haring; Kermit Oswald (b.1958, lives and works in Kutztown, PA)

Untitled, 1983

Day-glo paint and enamel on routed wood

72 in x 72 in x 7 5/8 in / 182.88 cm x 182.88 cm x 19.3 cm

© Keith Haring Foundation



Pierre Alechinsky, *Serpent de Binche*, 1973, Etching, Ed. no. 22/75, 15 in x 19 in / 40 cm x 50.1 cm, NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks, © Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris; photograph by Angelika Rinnhofer.

The carnival of Binche is a Belgian tradition which dates back to the 14th century and takes place in the lead up to Easter. One of the most iconic aspects of the event is the marching of the clown-like Gilles performers, who wear wax masks, regal costumes and enormous hats adorned with ostrich plumes. Alechinsky attended the carnival as a child, however it was not until 1965, after seeing a Mexican Day of the Dead festival, that he would employ the Flemish Gilles as a kind of avatar self-portrait. In this work, the creature's trim beard, glasses and snaking body (invoking CoBrA) are all clear indicators of Alechinsky's self-representation.



Keith Haring, *Self Portrait in Sphinx*, 1985, Acrylic on gessoed canvas, 48 in x 48 in / 121.92 cm x 121.92 cm
Collection of Kermit and Lisa Oswald, © Keith Haring Foundation

Portraits of Keith Haring are similarly identified by the presence of his eyeglasses, and while his iconic stick-like figures are defined by their non-descript universality, on the occasions when Haring does distinctly portray himself, it is never simple; rather, Haring exaggerates his features through caricature, and intermingles them with the allegory of a monstrous body.

Part of the success of Haring's work is derived from the simplicity and universality of his cartoon outlines. Yet simultaneously, the work is deeply personal, with coded references to Haring's self-identity scattered throughout the his oeuvre. In *Untitled (Animals)*, a symbolic self-portrait is detected in the single black animal that sticks out from the herd. Haring frequently spoke of his feelings of isolation and exclusion during childhood, that resulted from his preference for making art to playing sports, and the tension of hiding his queer identity from his peers. For Haring, Alechinsky, CoBrA, and countless other artists and cultures, animals and their archetypes provide a symbolic code through which myriad human experiences may be poetically depicted.



Keith Haring
Untitled (Animals), c. 1980
Ink and spray paint on paper
48.5 in x 61 in / 123 cm x 155 cm

©Keith Haring Foundation



Keith Haring
Untitled, April 1982
Acrylic on tarp
72 in x 72 in / 182.8 cm x 182.8 cm

Courtesy of Rita Krauss and Phyllis Mack
© Keith Haring Foundation

FOUR HANDED PAINTINGS

One of the central tenets of CoBrA was a belief in the power of collaboration. This involved not just visual artists working side by side, but also writers creating alongside painters. The free form nature of CoBrA meant that de-specialization and cross disciplinary practices were encouraged, something that spurred Alechinsky to become a virtuosic writer. As he stated, "painters write, writers paint." Alechinsky has collaborated with artists such as Asger Jorn, Karel Appel, Christian Dotremont and Walasse Ting, and writers including Michel Butor, Eugene Ionesco and Joyce Mansour, on what he calls "four-handed paintings". The way in which words and images coalesce in these works is akin to the pictorial nature of graffiti writing, which profoundly influenced Haring's art.

Keith Haring relocated to New York in 1978 to study at the School of Visual Arts (SVA). Once in the city, he quickly immersed himself in the East Village Art Scene, a movement that like CoBrA, was collaborative in nature. The eighties New York era was defined by a do-it-yourself attitude that saw artists mount their own group shows, while also banding together with other creatives to stage wildly chaotic happenings.

Haring's practice would see him work alongside figures such as graffiti writer LAll, artists Jean-Michel Basquiat and Kenny Scharf, and performers Grace Jones and Madonna. More important to him, however, were his collaborations with children in painting murals around the world. Like his CoBrA predecessors, who sought to make art with the same unbridled enthusiasm as children, Haring valued the freedom with which children created art, and saw their imagination as akin with his own way of seeing. As Haring once said, "Kids learn from me, and I learn from them."



Keith Haring; LA II (Angel Ortiz) (b. 1967, New York, NY; lives and works in New York, NY)
Untitled, November 9, 1981
Black felt tip pen on enamel on metal
48 in x 48 in / 121.92 cm x 121.92 cm

Private Collection
©Keith Haring Foundation

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks ©Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris; photograph by Angelika Rinnhofer

MORTALITY & LEGACY

Death hovered over both Haring and Alechinsky from an early age. As a teenager in German occupied Belgium, Alechinsky helped pull the dead bodies of his neighbors out of the rubble of their bombed homes. While his CoBrA compatriots grappled with their wartime trauma within their works, Alechinsky refused to bring these gruesome scenes to his art: "If I were to 'think' of bombing raids before the easel, instead of going towards the canvas, I would rush off to the lavatory to be sick."

At the age of 95, Alechinsky has seen many of his friends, heroes and neighbors pass on. However, his memories of them are palpable in the enlivened force of his paintings, which frequently invoke (both in their titling and mannerism) figures including the painter James Ensor, members of his CoBrA cohort Christian Dotremont, Asger Jorn and Reinhoud, artist Walasse Ting, writer Henri Michaux, and the artist's father.

While the young Haring was not exposed to death in the direct, visceral way Alechinsky was, being an American child of the fifties and sixties meant being raised on television and magazines such as *Life* and *Time*, where he would see images of the Vietnam War, chemical warfare, violent force turned against peaceful civil rights protesters, and the atomic bomb.

This experience profoundly affected Haring, who became a fundamental activist against the atrocities of war, racism and nuclear destruction. However, Haring's most virulent protest was his fight against government inaction in the face of the AIDS, the disease which would take his life in 1990. For Haring, his early death sentence, and the fact he did not have children, meant that he consummately channeled his life and energy into his art, which as he saw it, was "a quest for immortality".



Pierre Alechinsky, *Astres et Désastres I-VIII (Stars and Disasters I-8)*, 1969, Color etching, 15 3/8 in x 19 in / 39 cm x 48 cm

NSU Art Museum Fort Lauderdale, Cobra Collection; gift of Golda and Meyer Marks, © Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris; photograph by Steven Brooke

SACRED IMAGES

Haring grew up in Kutztown, a quiet borough in the valleys of Pennsylvania, home to a large Mennonite community. As a child, he attended church and Sunday school, which provided him with a wealth of religious narratives and iconography to symbolically communicate and reflect on his experiences. As an adult, art became Haring's passion. Jeffrey Deitch refers to Haring's "missionary zeal to enhance life through art, which instilled in him an unstoppable life force". We may imagine that Haring saw himself as a kind of prophet, akin to the figure of Moses, portrayed in his 1985 painting, *Moses and the Burning Bush*. For Haring, his prophetic purpose was to lead people into experiencing a more joyful, conscious and caring experience of life.

Alechinsky, by contrast, remains existential in his life view. Growing up in Nazi-controlled Belgium meant living in constant fear of being persecuted for his paternal Jewish lineage. The artist now identifies as a devout atheist, for whom any sacred symbols or narrative connections in his work are merely, "Squat[ters]". As the artist once proclaimed: "My own art is profane."



Keith Haring, *Moses and the Burning Bush*, 1985, Acrylic on canvas, 119 3/4 in x 144 1/8 in / 304.1 cm x 336 cm, Courtesy of Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, Bentonville, Arkansas © Keith Haring Foundation.

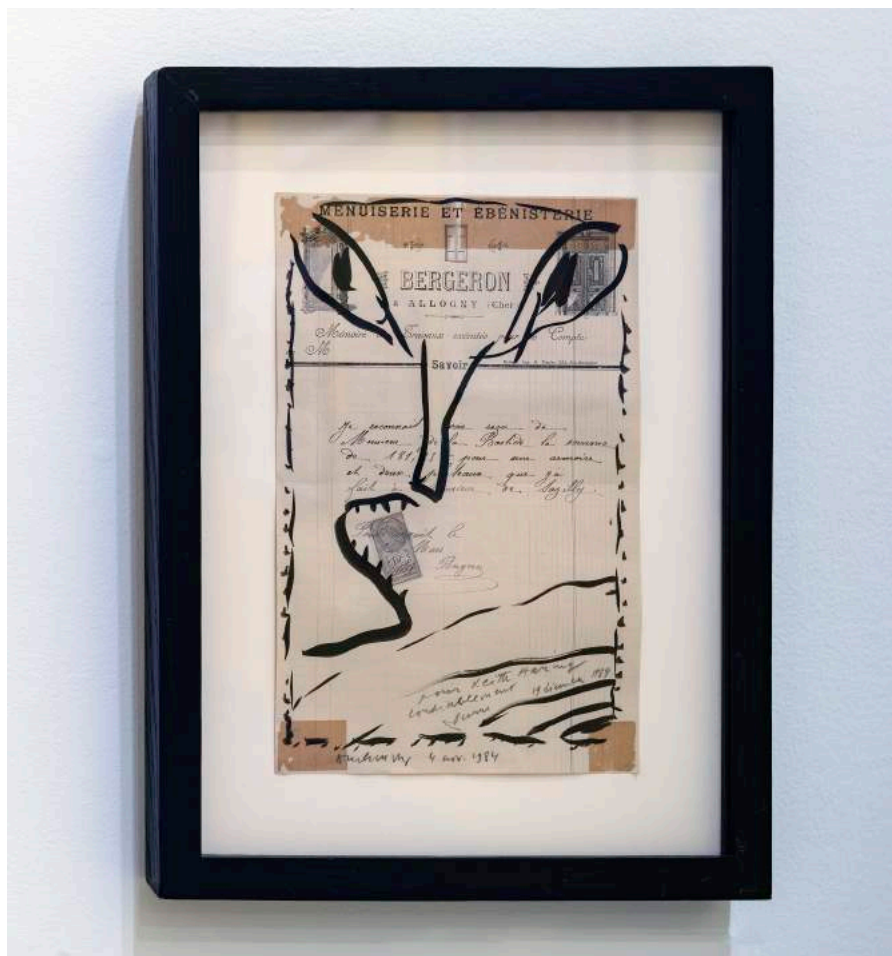
FOR JAMES ENSOR

In the same way that Alechinsky was a lifelong influence on Haring, Alechinsky has paid homage to the Belgian painter and print maker James Ensor (b. 1860, Ostend, Belgium - d. 1949, Ostend, Belgium) through out his career. Ensor was Belgium's preeminent modernist artist, and his wild carnivalesque images set the stage for the birth of Surrealism in the 1920s.

One of the earliest artworks Alechinsky remembers ever seeing is Ensor's engraving, *The Wind in the Leaves* (1888) hanging in his grandmother's home. At the age of 34, Ensor was still at the forefront of the artist's mind when he painted *Le Tombeau d'Ensor* (*Tomb of Ensor*) in 1961. The pale yet warm hues, and the spectacular gestures which emerge from calligraphic swirls are clear references to Ensor's macabre skulls and sugary palette. In what is perhaps a marked inevitability or incredible coincidence, Haring also dedicated two paintings to the Belgian master.



Pierre Alechinsky, *Le tombeau d'Ensor* (*Tomb of Ensor*), 1961, Oil on canvas, 65 5/16 in x 79 15/16 in / 170.9 cm x 203 cm, Museum of Fine Arts Houston, © Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris



Pierre Alechinsky, *Cordialement* / *Pierre* 19, Decembre, 1984, Ink on found furniture receipt, 11 3/4 in x 7 5/8 in / 29.8 cm x 19.3 cm, Private Collection, Belgium

© Pierre Alechinsky / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York / ADAGP, Paris; photograph by Steven Brooke

“CONFRONTATION” BY PIERRE ALECHINSKY

K.H. (1958-1990)
and
P.A. (1927-...)

Keith Haring was 19 when he visited, in Pittsburgh, the retrospective of the fifty something I was becoming in 1977. Many years later, I was surprised to learn that this visit was for him «the reason» for a life choice: to become an artist.

Had he seen a sign of encouragement in some shape or color or line? Still, he introduced me into his biography. So much so that the staff of the Whitney Museum borrowed my painting *Central Park* (1965) from me for his retrospective in 1997. Twenty years earlier, the artist had been struck by the work at the Carnegie Museum of Art, my first with «marginal remarks». Keith had wanted that to be known.

Having become famous, he came to see me.

Studio visit in the company of an editor...whose name I have forgotten. Sometimes, often, now more and more, *my memory is fading*, as Jeanne Moreau sang in the sixties.

Stop!

We are in 2022. I am ninety-five years old. My old brain tells me that it has just found a scrap of memory. On the port side: we recognize K.H. in P.A.'s workshop in Bougival in 1984. He offers a t-shirt decorated with his hand. To starboard: we see P.A. dedicating to K.H. a Chinese ink work on writings from another era.

Pierre Alechinsky
February 9 2022

“CONFRONTATION”

Par PIERRE ALECHINSKY

K.H. (1958-1990)
and
P.A. (1927-...)

Keith Haring avait 19 ans lorsqu’il visita, à Pittsburgh, la rétrospective du quinquagénaire que je devenais en 1977. Bien des années plus tard, j’ai eu la surprise d’apprendre que cette visite fut pour lui la «cause occasionnelle» d’un choix de vie: devenir artiste.

Avait-t-il vu un signe d’encouragement dans je ne sais quelle forme, couleur ou ligne? Toujours est-il qu’il m’introduisit dans sa biographie. Tant et si bien que le staff du Whitney Museum m’emprunta *Central Park* pour sa rétrospective en 1997. Vingt ans plus tôt, l’artiste avait été frappé au Carnegie Museum of Art par mon premier tableau de 1965 «remarques marginale». Keith avait tenu à ce que cela se sache.

Devenu célèbre, il vint me voir.

Visite d’atelier en compagnie d’un éditeur... dont j’ai oublié le nom. Parfois, souvent, à présent de plus en plus, *j’ai la mémoire qui flanche*, comme chantait Jeanne Moreau dans les années soixante.

Stop!

Nous sommes en 2022. J’ai quatre-vingt quinze ans. Ma vieille cervelle me signale qu’elle vient de retrouver une bribe de souvenir. À babord: on reconnaît K.H. dans l’atelier de P.A. à Bougival en 1984. Il lui offre un t-shirt orné de sa main. À tribord: on aperçoit P.A. dédicçant à K.H. une encre de Chine sur des écritures d’une autre époque.

Pierre Alechinsky
9 Février 2022

TIMELINE

October 19, 1927

Pierre Alechinsky is born in Brussels, Belgium. His family later moves to the nearby city of Liège where the artist spends his childhood.

1940

German Nazi occupation of Belgium during World War II, Alechinsky's family lives in fear of his father's Jewish identity leading to their extermination, but hides under the cover of his mother's Christian Wallonian nationality.

1944

Alechinsky enrolls at La Cambre visual art school in Brussels, studies illustration, printing and photography.

February 4, 1945

Belgium is liberated by Western Allies.

November 8, 1948

CoBrA is founded in Paris at the café of the Hotel Notre Dame, Paris.

March 1949

Pierre Alechinsky is exposed to a CoBrA exhibition at the Palais des Beaux Arts in Brussels. Immediately seeks out group secrétaire général Christian Dotremont, who invites him to become part of the group, despite him being almost 10 years younger than most of the members.

1951

CoBrA quietly disbands, partially due to Asger Jorn and Christian Dotremont's contraction of tuberculosis. Alechinsky moves to Paris, remains in France to this day.

1955

Alechinsky travels to Asia to study Japanese calligraphy, creates a documentary on the subject. The visit completely transforms the nature of his practice.

May 4, 1958

Keith Haring is born in Reading, Pennsylvania. Family moves to Kutztown, where Haring's parents and siblings still live.

1965

Alechinsky paints his chef d'oeuvre, *Central Park*, his first work to include his signature 'marginal remarks' motif.

1972

Alechinsky represents Belgium at the 36th Venice Biennale, invites Christian Dotremont to exhibit alongside him.

1976

Haring moves to Pittsburgh to attend the Ivy School for Professional Art.

October 1977

Alechinsky's retrospective opens at the Carnegie Museum of Art. Haring visits and experiences an artistic revelation, consequently drops out of Ivy School after only two semesters.

1978

Haring writes his manifesto, *The Public Has a Right to Art*. Decides to move to New York and enroll at the School of Visual Arts.

Haring mounts his first exhibition at the Pittsburgh Center for the Arts, where he previously worked as a janitor.

1979

Haring moves to the East Village, becomes part of the zeitgeist art scene, befriends artists and musicians including Jean-Michel Basquiat, Kenny Scharf, Tseng Kwong Chi, Andy Warhol, Madonna, Debbie Harry and Grace Jones.

1980

Haring begins his Subway Drawing series.

1981

US Center for Disease Control begins publishing articles identifying rare lung infections and immune system deficiencies, particularly identified among gay men. The illness begins to be referred to as 'gay cancer'.

Haring visits Alechinsky's print retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

1982

Keith Haring has his first major gallery show at Tony Shafrazi Gallery, New York, in collaboration with graffiti artist LAll. Receives instant public recognition and celebrity artist status.

1983-1987

Alechinsky serves as a professor of painting at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris.

November 4, 1984

Keith Haring seeks out Alechinsky and makes pilgrimage to the artist's studio in Bougival, France. The artists exchange gifts, and Alechinsky teaches Haring his signature marouflage technique.

1986

Haring opens his first Pop Shop at 292 Lafayette Street in New York, beginning the mass distribution of his artwork imagery on apparel, posters, pins and ephemera.

1987

Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum presents, *Pierre Alechinsky: Margin and Center*, a major retrospective dedicated to the artist.

Keith Haring travels to Knokke, Belgium to paint a mural at the beach town's casino. Resides in artist Niki de Saint Phalle's *Le Dragon* sculpture while visiting, adds his own mural to the sculpture's interior.

1988

Haring officially diagnosed with HIV.

1989

Haring's article, *Just Say Know* is printed in *Rolling Stone* magazine, publicly describes living with AIDS.

February 16, 1990

Haring dies from AIDS related complications at the age of 31.

1997

The Whitney mounts a major traveling retrospective of Haring, in which they include Alechinsky's painting, *Central Park* (1965) to represent the weight of his influence on Haring.

2006

Alechinsky made a Roi de la Légion d'honneur in France.

2007

The Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium pays tribute to Alechinsky, dedicating a retrospective to the artist on the occasion of his 80th birthday.

2018

Pierre Alechinsky, after living in France for 67 years, is officially granted French citizenship.

2022

Pierre Alechinsky continues to live and create new work at his studio in Bougival, France, which he has maintained since 1963.

Haring's legacy vibrantly lives on, celebrated through exhibitions, installations, clothing, documentaries, and ongoing academic scholarship across the world.



**NSU ART
MUSEUM**
FORT LAUDERDALE

NSU
Florida
NOVA SOUTHEASTERN
UNIVERSITY