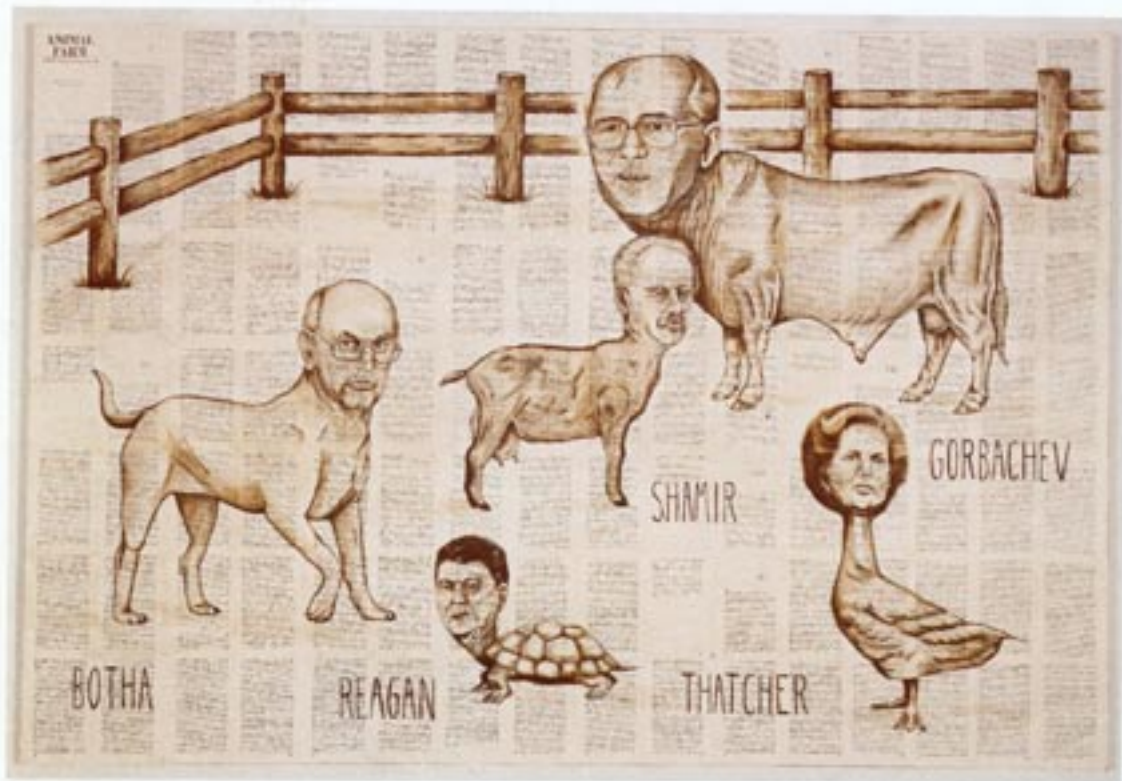


DIRECTIONS

TIM ROLLINS AND K.O.S. ANIMAL FARM

SEPTEMBER 17 - DECEMBER 6, 1992



Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Richard Cruz, George Garces, Nelson Montes, Carlos Rivera, Annette Rosado, Nelson Savinon). *From the Animal Farm I, 1985-88.* Acrylic and pencil on printed paper on linen; 55 x 90 in. Collection Mr. and Mrs. William Mack.

DURING FIVE DAYS IN JULY, THE collaborative artist group Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival) conducted a workshop for eleven local high-school students at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, D.C. Artist and teacher Rollins selected the students through a competitive District-wide portfolio review, choosing those who displayed talent for caricature and portraiture. The goal of the intensive workshop sessions was collectively to create a large-scale painting, based on George Orwell's cautionary fable *Animal Farm* (1945), depicting approximately one hundred world leaders as barnyard animals. The painting is the centerpiece of the Hirshhorn's exhibition "Directions—Tim Rollins and K.O.S.: *Animal Farm*," which also includes related studies by individual students and earlier paintings on the same theme by Rollins and K.O.S.

From their home base in the South Bronx section of New York City, Tim Rollins and K.O.S. have been making art collaboratively for ten years. In 1980 Rollins was a cofounder of Group Material, a group of artists who worked together to create exhibitions around particular social themes. A year later, he was recruited to teach special education classes at a public school in the South Bronx. Most of his students were truant, classified as learning disabled, or had behavioral problems but also exhibited artistic talent. K.O.S. evolved from the afterschool workshops for these students that Rollins conducted on his own. By 1984 he had established the Art and Knowledge Workshop, Inc., in a local community center.

A group of workshop regulars, 11-16 years old, became the self-named K.O.S. Over the years, the membership has changed but the requirement that members be in either secondary school or college remains. The present core includes long-time members Angel Abreu, Carlos Rivera, and Nelson Savinon, with newcomers Jorge Abreu, Christopher Hernandez, and Victor Llanos. In 1987 Rollins left the public school system to devote himself full-time to the Art and Knowledge Workshop, where he and K.O.S. gather to study and produce art.

In order to instill K.O.S. with pride in their production, Rollins, from the beginning, ran a professional studio. As soon as they could afford it, the group bought the best art supplies and eventually moved the Workshop into a spacious warehouse loft. Although initially their works seemed aligned to the graffiti tradition of impoverished urban areas, Rollins and K.O.S. soon found their voices in a sophisticated



Rollins discussing the composition of *Animal Farm '92* with (from the left) K.O.S. member Angel Abreu and District students Nekisha Durrette and Micah Lee.

merging of art historical and mass culture influences. None of the ghetto stereotypes would apply.

The nature of their collaboration is complex but organized. Rollins likens it to a choir, where he is the conductor but, as in all good choruses, the individual voices must be developed and encouraged to sing. Because they work on several projects at once, each K.O.S. member performs the jobs at which he or she is particularly adept. Some are proficient draftsmen, and others are better abstract painters. The older, more experienced members help the younger ones.

Rollins relies on books as teaching tools. He begins each project by selecting a classic of Western literature. After K.O.S. approves his choice, the group reads and analyzes the book, relating elements in its story line to contemporary issues and generating ideas for images of which they make studies. Rollins urges the group not to get "lost" in books but use them for inspiration. Usually, the group prepares a canvas by gluing the actual pages of the book onto it, creating a grid-like pattern and painting on this field of text.

The centrality of ideas through language and text is of primary importance to Rollins and K.O.S.'s efforts. The actual textual background of works like *Animal Farm '92* is also the conceptual background. The group's painting on books, whether actual or metaphorical, is their updated interpretation in their own visual language or, as Rollins asserts, they "re-write the book" in this manner.

DURING FIVE DAYS IN JULY, THE collaborative artist group Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival) conducted a workshop for eleven local high-school students at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, D.C. Artist and teacher Rollins selected the students through a competitive District-wide portfolio review, choosing those who displayed talent for caricature and portraiture. The goal of the intensive workshop sessions was collectively to create a large-scale painting, based on George Orwell's cautionary fable *Animal Farm* (1945), depicting approximately one hundred world leaders as barnyard animals. The painting is the centerpiece of the Hirshhorn's exhibition "Directions—Tim Rollins and K.O.S.: *Animal Farm*," which also includes related studies by individual students and earlier paintings on the same theme by Rollins and K.O.S.

From their home base in the South Bronx section of New York City, Tim Rollins and K.O.S. have been making art collaboratively for ten years. In 1980 Rollins was a cofounder of Group Material, a group of artists who worked together to create exhibitions around particular social themes. A year later, he was recruited to teach special education classes at a public school in the South Bronx. Most of his students were truant, classified as learning disabled, or had behavioral problems but also exhibited artistic talent. K.O.S. evolved from the afterschool workshops for these students that Rollins conducted on his own. By 1984 he had established the Art and Knowledge Workshop, Inc., in a local community center.

A group of workshop regulars, 11-16 years old, became the self-named K.O.S. Over the years, the membership has changed but the requirement that members be in either secondary school or college remains. The present core includes long-time members Angel Abreu, Carlos Rivera, and Nelson Savinon, with newcomers Jorge Abreu, Christopher Hernandez, and Victor Llanos. In 1987 Rollins left the public school system to devote himself full-time to the Art and Knowledge Workshop, where he and K.O.S. gather to study and produce art.

In order to instill K.O.S. with pride in their production, Rollins, from the beginning, ran a professional studio. As soon as they could afford it, the group bought the best art supplies and eventually moved the Workshop into a spacious warehouse loft. Although initially their works seemed aligned to the graffiti tradition of impoverished urban areas, Rollins and K.O.S. soon found their voices in a sophisticated



Rollins discussing the composition of *Animal Farm '92* with (from the left) K.O.S. member Angel Abreu and District students Nekisha Durrette and Miché Lee.

merging of art historical and mass culture influences. None of the ghetto stereotypes would apply.

The nature of their collaboration is complex but organized. Rollins likens it to a choir, where he is the conductor but, as in all good choruses, the individual voices must be developed and encouraged to sing. Because they work on several projects at once, each K.O.S. member performs the jobs at which he or she is particularly adept. Some are proficient draftsmen, and others are better abstract painters. The older, more experienced members help the younger ones.

Rollins relies on books as teaching tools. He begins each project by selecting a classic of Western literature. After K.O.S. approves his choice, the group reads and analyzes the book, relating elements in its story line to contemporary issues and generating ideas for images of which they make studies. Rollins urges the group not to get "lost" in books but use them for inspiration. Usually, the group prepares a canvas by gluing the actual pages of the book onto it, creating a grid-like pattern and painting on this field of text.

The centrality of ideas through language and text is of primary importance to Rollins and K.O.S.'s efforts. The actual textual background of works like *Animal Farm '92* is also the conceptual background. The group's painting on books, whether actual or metaphorical, is their updated interpretation in their own visual language or, as Rollins asserts, they "re-write the book" in this manner.

The theories of the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire are an inspiration to Rollins. Freire advocates an active and empowering learning process in which students become "subject-readers" who critically analyze a text. Citing his experiences teaching in rural areas of Brazil, Freire grounds his instruction in language related to a student's experience. He believes in a literacy that heightens self-awareness and thus inevitably liberates the learner from the societal constraints of ignorance and poverty.¹

Similarly, Rollins views education as a liberating force. His goals range from motivating K.O.S. members and workshop participants to stay in school and encouraging them to attend college to transforming them into confident and productive people who "make history." He pushes K.O.S. to transform any perceived limitations into strengths, accepting no excuses for anything less than their best.

Producing on-going series of works, Rollins and K.O.S. have created art inspired by a variety of books, including *Through the Looking Glass* by Lewis Carroll, *Amerika* by Franz Kafka, *The Scarlet Letter* by Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Temptation of St. Anthony* by Gustave Flaubert, and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. More recently, they have painted their version of *From the Earth to the Moon* by Jules Verne and created sculptures from Collodi's *The Adventures of Pinocchio*.

In 1987 they traveled to Charlotte, North Carolina, to conduct their first off-campus workshop and produced *Amerika VI*. They have also collaborated with students in Minneapolis, Boston, Chicago, Pittsburgh, Derry in Northern Ireland, and London. Their interest in conducting a workshop in Washington around the theme "Animal Farm" was prompted by the political atmosphere of the nation's capital.

Orwell's *Animal Farm* relates the evils of a totalitarian state. Loosely based on the events of the Russian Revolution, the story occurs on an English farm. The animals seize the farm and oust its exploitative human owners. Initially, the revolution creates an egalitarian and beneficent society, embodied in seven commandments that proclaim that anything on two legs is an enemy; forbid animals to kill each other, wear clothes, or otherwise act human; and declare the equality of all animals. By the book's conclusion, however, the leaders have emulated the evil human characteristics they originally renounced, and the seven commandments have been reduced to a single, more efficient canon: "All animals are equal but some animals are more equal than others."

The book presents a lesson in power and its effect on those who lead, and Rollins asked the group to think not only about who was in the barnyard but also who built it. He had used *Animal Farm* earlier as a way of motivating K.O.S. members to learn about politics and geography. Dismayed by their lack of knowledge of these subjects, Rollins organized them to get information about political figures using newspapers, magazines, and books. The artists produced portraits of the leaders and, armed with new knowledge about them, began matching their heads to animal bodies. The group created *From the Animal Farm I*, 1985-88, which included Ronald Reagan (United States) as a turtle, Mikhail Gorbachev (former Soviet Union) as a bull, P.W. Botha (South Africa) as a dog, Margaret Thatcher (United Kingdom) as a goose, and Yitzhak Shamir (Israel) as a goat. They also produced several single-figure paintings such as *From the Animal Farm: Waldheim*, 1984-87, which depicts Austria's former head of state.

Aside from the opportunity to examine international politics, the "Animal Farm" works provided K.O.S. with a chance to demonstrate their drawing skills. Many of them had begun their artistic activities by drawing comic-book figures and other hybrid human-beast forms. To these pop culture influences, Rollins added the study of art historical sources.

Rollins and K.O.S. looked with particular interest to nineteenth-century French political caricature. Daumier, Grandville, and Traviès had contributed caricatures to *Le Caricature* and *Le Charivari*, short-lived but very influential French journals published by the artist Charles Philippon from 1830-35 during the brief suspension of censorship under the reign of Louis-Philippe. Grandville's work is particularly relevant to the "Animal Farm" works because of his series of people portrayed with animal heads.² The group also studied the anti-fascist photomontages of the German artist John Heartfield produced during the 1930s. His technique of combining different photographs into one composition would apply to the group's method of composing the "Animal Farm" personalities.

For the Washington workshop, Rollins and K.O.S. brought numerous art books from which the District students were expected to draw. On the first day, they copied reproductions of works by the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, self-taught African-American artist Bill Traylor, as well as Daumier, Grandville, Traviès, and Heartfield. In addition to these art historical figures, Rollins also discussed certain terms that the students were expected to learn: zoomorphic caricature, photo-



District student Trevor Cain painting the figure of Melis Zenzow on *Animal Farm* '92

montage, and collage. Three prints from the collaborative group's collection served as inspiration: one by Travies, one by Philipon, and one by the late eighteenth- to early nineteenth-century Spanish artist Francisco de Goya from his series entitled "Los Caprichos," in which a teacher and his pupil are both portrayed as donkeys. The caption states that the student perhaps knows more than the artist.

Once the historical sources were examined, Rollins assigned political leaders to the students, providing them with photographs from various print media from which they drew portraits. Anyone unfamiliar with the leader's country was referred to the world atlas. The students, along with Rollins and K.O.S., then chose the corresponding animal body from a book of nineteenth-century animal illustrations. After copying these images and fusing the body parts, some students made watercolor versions of their figures. A transparency of each hybrid form was made with a photocopier and projected onto the canvas prepared with book pages. After outlining the projected images in pencil, the students began painting the outlines with acrylic paint in an earthy, raw umber color.

While the District students concentrated on their caricatures and Rollins offered critiques on their progress the participating K.O.S. members—Angel Abreu,

Victor Llanos, and Nelson Savinon—worked as technical assistants, teaching the students how to mix paint, make transparencies, and make a scale drawing of the entire barnyard scene. The entire team determined the placement of the figures. George Bush as a fox was to be at the center of the barnyard and so was painted in first. By the end of the workshop, the students had added eight other images, including Vaclav Havel (former Czechoslovakia) as a butterfly, Fidel Castro (Cuba) as an old dog, and Helmut Kohl (Germany) as an eagle. Rollins and K.O.S. brought the unfinished canvases back to the Art and Knowledge Workshop for completion.

This exhibition was an opportunity for Tim Rollins and K.O.S. to share their group artmaking experience with Washington, D.C., students. The participating District students were Trevor Cain, Julia Davis, Nekisha Durette, Taiwo Heard, Kirby Kok, Micah Lee, Henry Meléndez, Anthony Melvin, Anthony Mincey, Sylvester Mobley, and Diana Zamas.

Our gratitude goes to Martis Davis, Principal, and Mel Davis, Chairman of the Visual Arts Department, of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts for so generously providing us with the studio space for the workshop. Teresia Bush, an educator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, played a crucial part in this project. Special thanks also to Jamie Kim Cohen for her invaluable assistance, as well as to Michael Lerner from the Art and Knowledge Workshop.

Amada Cruz
Assistant Curator

1. See Paulo Freire, *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power, and Liberation* (Granby, Mass.: Bergin and Garvey Publishers, 1985).

2. William Fewer, *Masters of Caricature from Hogarth and Gillray to Scarfe and Levine* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), pp. 70-72, 78.

This exhibition was supported, in part, by Loews L'Enfant Plaza Hotel, Washington, D.C.

BIOGRAPHY

Tim Rollins. Born in Pittsfield, Maine, June 10, 1955. Educated at School of Visual Arts, New York, 1975-77, B.F.A. 1977; New York University, 1977, 1979. Lives and works in New York City.

K.O.S. (current members): Angel Abreu, born in New York City, March 2, 1974; Jorge Abreu, born in New York City, April 17, 1979; Christopher Hernandez, born in New York City, March 11, 1978; Victor Llanos, born in New York City, November 9, 1975; Carlos Rivera, born in New York City, October 7, 1971; Nelson Savinon, born in New York City, September 12, 1971.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 1985 Art Gallery, Hostos Community College, Bronx, New York.
1986 Jay Gorney Modern Art, New York (also 1988, 1989).
1987 Lawrence Oliver Gallery, Philadelphia.
1988 Walker Art Center, Minneapolis; Riverside Studios, London, and tour; Barbara Krakow Gallery, Boston.
1989 Dia Art Foundation, New York.
1990 Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford; Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel; Crown Point Press, New York.
1991 Rhona Hoffman Gallery, Chicago.
1992 Mary Boone Gallery, New York.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brooks, Rosetta. "Tim Rollins & K.O.S." *Artscribe International* 63 (May 1987): 40-47. Interview.
Decter, Joshua. "Tim Rollins & K.O.S.: The Workshop Has Survived Because We Love Each Other." *Flash Art* 150 (January-February 1990): 89-93. Interview.
"Collaboration: Tim Rollins and K.O.S." *Parkett* 20 (June 1989): 34-117.
Garreis, Gary, ed. *Amerika: Tim Rollins & K.O.S.* Exhibition catalog. New York: Dia Art Foundation, 1989.
Glueck, Grace. "'Survival Kids' Transfer Classics to Murals." *New York Times* (13 November 1988): 1, 42.
Nison, Lisbet. "From Dead End to Avant-garde." *Art News* 87 (December 1988): 132-37.
Smith, Roberta. "Art: A Collaboration, Tim Rollins and K.O.S." *New York Times* (21 November 1986): C28.

———. "Tim Rollins and K.O.S." *New York Times* (19 June 1992): C16.

Tim Rollins & K.O.S. Exhibition catalog. London: Riverside Studios, 1988.

Tim Rollins & K.O.S. *Temptation of Saint Anthony 1987-1990*. Exhibition catalog. Basel: Museum für Gegenwartskunst, 1990.

Viewpoints: *Tim Rollins & K.O.S.* Exhibition brochure. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1988.

CHECKLIST

All works are collection of the artist unless noted otherwise.

Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Nelson Savinon). *From the Animal Farm*: Waldhelm (Austria), 1984-87. Acrylic on printed paper on linen; 25 x 20 in. Collection Peter Hort.

Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Richard Cruz, George Garces, Nelson Montes, Carlos Rivera, Annette Rosado, Nelson Savinon). *From the Animal Farm I*, 1985-88. Pencil and acrylic on printed paper on linen; 55 x 80 in. Collection Mr. and Mrs. William Mack.

Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Angel Abreu, Jorge Abreu, Christopher Hernandez, Victor Llanos, Carlos Rivera, Nelson Savinon) and Washington, D.C., students (Trevor Cain, Julia Davis, Nekisha Durrette, Taiwo Heard, Kirby Kok, Micah Lee, Henry Meléndez, Anthony Melvin, Anthony Mincey, Sylvester Mobley, Diana Zumas). *Animal Farm '92*, 1992. Pencil and acrylic on printed paper on linen; 108 x 540 in. overall. Collection Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

Trevor Cain. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Meles Zenawi (Ethiopia), 1992. Pencil and watercolor on vellum; 12 x 19 in.

Trevor Cain. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Mikhail Gorbachev (former Soviet Union), 1992. Pencil, photomechanical reproduction, and tape on paper; 16 x 11 in.

Trevor Cain. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Yitzhak Rabin (Israel), 1992. Colored pencil, charcoal, and tape on paper; 12 x 13 in.

Julia Davis. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Mohamed Boudiat (Algeria), 1992. Pencil and tape on vellum; 15 x 11 in.

Julia Davis. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Vaclav Havel (former Czechoslovakia), 1992. Pencil and tape on paper and vellum; 20 x 16½ in.

Julia Davis. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Vytautas Landsbergis (Lithuania), 1992. Pencil and tape on vellum; 18 x 14 in.

Nekisha Durrette. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Saddam Hussein (Iraq), 1992. Pencil, watercolor, and tape on paper; 22½ x 30 in.

Taiwo Heard. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Ranasinghe Premadasa (Sri Lanka), 1992. Colored pencil on vellum; 16 x 14 in.

Kirby Kok. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Sultan Sir Muda Hassanah Bokiah Mu'izzadin Waddullah (Brunei), 1992. Colored pencil on vellum; 13 x 17 in.

Micah Lee. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Helmut Kohl (Germany), 1992. Pencil on paper; 4 x 2½ in.

Micah Lee. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: John Major (United Kingdom), 1992. Pencil and watercolor on vellum; 18 x 14 in.

Henry Meléndez. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Robert Hawke (Australia), 1992. Pencil and watercolor on paper; 12 x 8¼ in.

Henry Meléndez. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Hafez al-Assad (Syria), 1992. Pencil and watercolor on paper; 24 x 36 in.

Anthony Melvin. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Paul Biya (Cameroon), 1992. Pencil, charcoal, and watercolor on paper; 18 x 24 in.

Anthony Mincey. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: F.W. de Klerk (South Africa), 1992. Pencil on vellum; 12½ x 13 in.

Anthony Mincey. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Nelson Mandela (African National Congress, South Africa), 1992. Pencil and tape on paper and vellum; 13½ x 15 in.

Sylvester Mobley. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Carlos Menem (Argentina), 1992. Pencil, watercolor, and tape on paper; 26½ x 23½ in.

Diana Zumas. *Study for "Animal Farm '92"*: Mary Robinson (Ireland), 1992. Pencil, charcoal, watercolor, and tape on paper; 18½ x 24 in.



HIRSHHORN MUSEUM AND
SCULPTURE GARDEN
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION