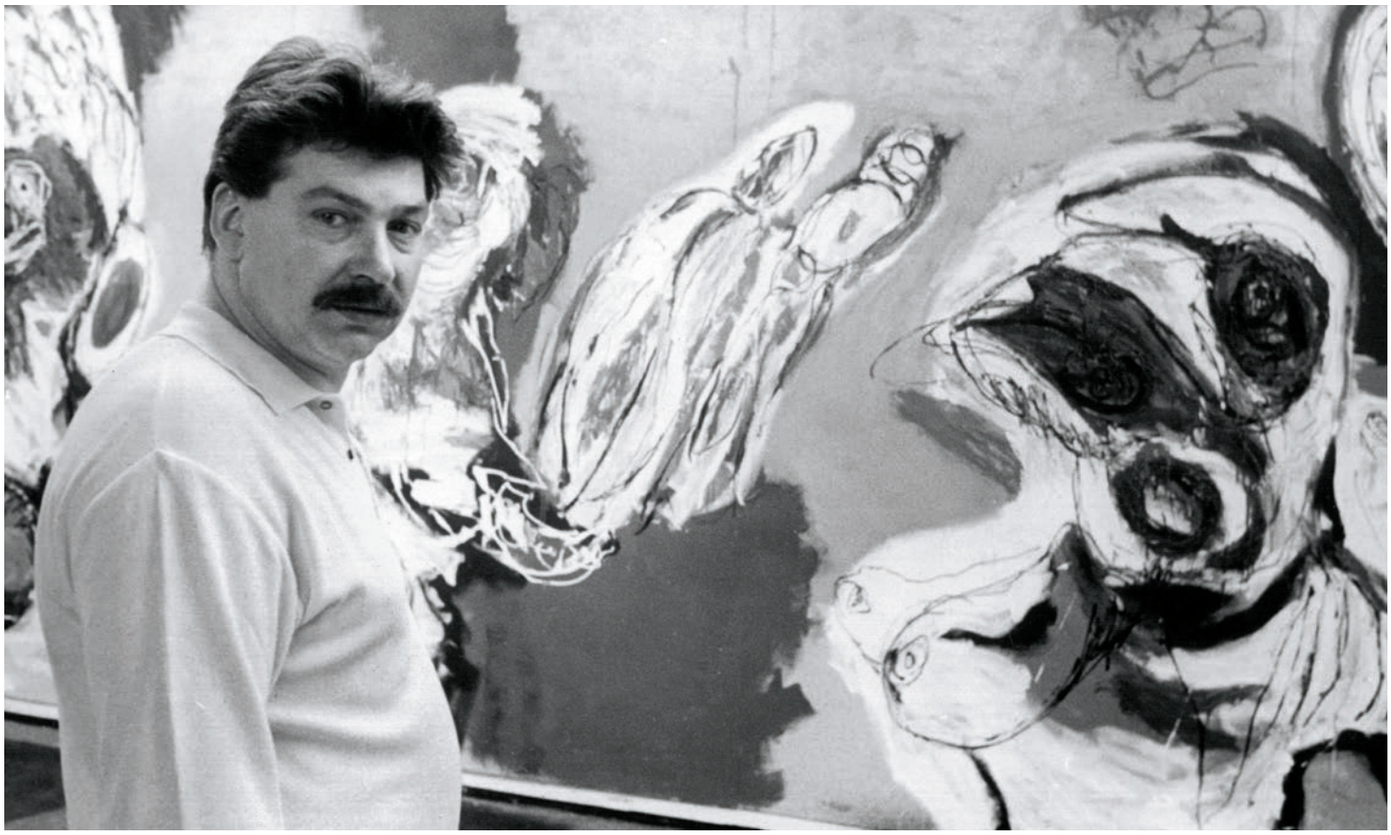
Paris / New York

The 2022 exhibition at Galerie Max Hetzler in London displayed works created after Appel's first visit to New York in 1957. From then on, he spent several months a year in the United States, initially borrowing studio space from artist friends. From the 1970s onwards Appel had his own studio in New York, but he never sought American citizenship since he identified as a European artist. In New York he met jazz musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Sarah Vaughan, Count Basie and Miles Davis, whom he painted, as well as fellow artists from the New York School – especially Willem de Kooning and Franz Kline.

Soon after his return to Paris, Appel realised *Rencontre au printemps* (1958; pp. 47–49), a monumental painting commissioned by UNESCO to decorate its new headquarters, which opened in Paris in 1959 (see also the following chapter). The immense dimensions of this painting correspond to works from the New York School rather than to their European counterparts, and it is stylistically reminiscent of action painting. It is the first painting of what is probably the most abstract phase in Appel's oeuvre, represented in the London exhibition by two examples, *Bataille d'animaux* from 1958 (p. 19) and *Paysage humain* from 1959 (pp. 26/27). In 1961, the Dutch journalist and filmmaker Jan Vrijman made the film *The Reality of Karel Appel*, which shows the artist as an action painter, comparable to Hans Namuth's depiction of Jackson Pollock in a film made ten years earlier. Appel's documenta painting of 1964 (pp. 14–17) epitomises this type of work and the story of its creation is the stuff of legends: In 1954, Appel was invited both to the Venice Biennale, which announced the end of Paris' status as art capital, and to documenta III. Since the pictures selected for the Kassel exhibition were not released by customs in time, Appel, on the eve of the opening, had four chipboards mounted on the wall reserved for him and ordered paint. He created the painting measuring 2.7 x 6.8 metres in one night. This work was exhibited by Galerie Max Hetzler for the first time since then, more than half a century later.

While one part of the exhibition was devoted to action painting, another section presented a concise overview of the other theme that Appel brought back from New



York, which might surprise in this context: paintings of nudes. This historically academic subject seems to contradict both abstract action painting and Appel's earlier Cobra works, which were often inspired by children's drawings and outsider art in stark contrast with academic ideals. Although Appel had drawn nudes during his studies at the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam, and there is a nude from 1953 painted entirely in the Cobra style (p. 23), the nude did not develop into a full series until 1957. One can assume this was inspired by his meeting with Willem de Kooning, who, like Appel, worked between abstraction and figuration and was already famous for his female nudes. The presentation at Galerie Max Hetzler showed a selection of nudes from the early 1960s to Appel's late work.

20 January–26 February 2022, 41 Dover Street, London

 Karel Appel in front of his painting for documenta III, Fridericianum, Kassel 1964