

# Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

## *THE TIME MACHINE*

6 September – 12 October 2013

Press Release

Xavier Hufkens is pleased to announce an exhibition of new work by American artists Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

Tim Rollins (b. 1955, Pittsfield, Maine) began teaching art in a South Bronx public school in 1981. His lessons incorporated creative work with reading and writing lessons for educationally disadvantaged or emotionally 'at risk' students. Rollins told his class on that first day, 'today we are going to make art, but we are also going to make history'. When asked what he meant by 'making history', Rollins said: 'To dare to make history when you are young, when you are a minority, when you are working, or non-working class, when you are voiceless in society, takes courage. Where we came from, just surviving is 'making history'. So many others, in the same situations, have not survived, physically, psychologically, spiritually, or socially. We were making our own history. We weren't going to accept history as something given to us.'

In a process they called 'jammin', Rollins or one of the students read aloud from a selected text while the other members drew, relating the stories to their own experiences. Tim Rollins and K.O.S. (Kids of Survival) began producing works of art directly on the pages of these books, which they cut out and placed on a canvas in a grid – a technique that developed into a unique artistic signature. Thirty-one years later, works by K.O.S. members can be found in the permanent collections of over ninety-five museums worldwide. Tim Rollins and K.O.S. continue to conduct art workshops with young people and to produce collaborative works in the form of drawings, photographs, sculptural objects and paintings on canvas and paper.

For their second exhibition at the Xavier Hufkens gallery, Tim Rollins and K.O.S. focus on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Taking the notion of time travel as their starting point, the K.O.S. journey back to the year 1837 and meet Charles Darwin just as he is beginning to sketch out his idea of a 'tree of life'. Darwin developed his powerful drawing into the theory of evolution published as *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. This seminal work gave rise to a more realistic theory of life and brought Romanticism, and the search for creative inspiration in nature, to an end. *The Time Machine* series, on the other hand, is named after the science fiction novella by H.G. Wells. Published in 1895, the book is widely credited as having popularised the idea of time travel by using a machine that enables the operator to move purposefully and selectively through different eras, including the future. Wells used *The Time Machine* to introduce the concept of a fourth dimension existing alongside the three dimensions of space: length, width and depth. Another definition for the fourth dimension, however, is the act of perceiving (consciousness) or feeling (sensation). Artists and writers often think of the fourth dimension as the life of the mind. Tim Rollins and K.O.S. declare: 'We believe that every total work of art is a time machine – a synthesis of a living past and present located in an object that can only be completed by the social experience of a viewer in the future. The total work of art exists in the invisible fourth dimension of space/time and it is this notion that unites the works in the exhibition. We paint on historic texts in the present so that they can haunt our futures.'

A related series of works explores the music of Franz Joseph Haydn and Felix Mendelssohn: perhaps two of the greatest composers of the Romantic era. *Songs Without Words (after Mendelssohn)* takes its title from a series of short lyrical piano pieces written by Felix Mendelssohn. The composer was the grandson of Moses Mendelssohn, the celebrated philosopher who developed the theory of the sublime in art, and also the varied notions of immensity. In *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, K.O.S. re-imagines the first performance of Haydn's identically titled orchestral meditation. Inspired by the seven short

phrases uttered by Jesus on the cross, his work was commissioned for the Good Friday service at Cádiz Cathedral, Spain. Of the first performance in 1786 Haydn wrote: 'the walls, windows, and pillars of the church were hung with black cloth, and only one large lamp hanging from the centre of the roof broke the solemn darkness.' This atmosphere is echoed in the black spinel pigment that is painted over the musical score.

The end result of the group's meanderings through history is a unique dialogue between literature and music, science, art, the past and the future – one that touches, both literally and figuratively, upon tragedy and hope, destruction and transformation.

The work of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. has been included in two of the Whitney Museum of American Art's Biennials (1985, 1991); Documenta in Kassel, Germany (1987); the Venice Biennale (1988); and the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh (1988).

Solo exhibitions include *Tim Rollins and K.O.S. - On Transfiguration*, Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel, Switzerland (2012); *Tim Rollins and K.O.S. - The Black Spot*, Talbot Rice Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (2012); *Tim Rollins and K.O.S. - On Transfiguration*, GAMeC - Galleria d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Bergamo, Bergamo, Italy (2011); *What Matters*, Worcester Art Museum, Worcester/MA, USA (2010); *Tim Rollins and K.O.S - A History*, the Frances Young Tang Teaching Museum and Art Gallery at Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs and travelling to the Frye Museum in Seattle and the ICA Philadelphia, USA (2009).

Tim Rollins and K.O.S. participated in the Wide Open School at the Hayward Gallery, London (2012), and are currently collaborating with the New York School of Visual Arts on the creation of a work for the High Line Park.