

WEXLER GALLERY

Studio K.O.S.: The Continuing Legacy of Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival
(Selected works from 1987 – 2020)

On view January 15 – March 20, 2021 (by appointment)
at Wexler Gallery 201 N 3rd Street Philadelphia, PA 19106

Studio K.O.S.: The Continuing Legacy of Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival is an exhibition that offers a look at the historical artwork of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. alongside artwork from the contemporary practice of Studio K.O.S, the artist collective now continuing the legacy of their long-time mentor Rollins. The two bodies of work are inextricably connected, one being the foundation of the other. The show marks the beginning of a new chapter in which the K.O.S. members take on a leading role, while still being guided by the unchanging principles of transcendence through collaborative art and knowledge.

In the first week of July 2020, Studio K.O.S. led a week-long program called **Collaborative Workshops for Transcendence through Art and Knowledge** for selected Philadelphia area high school students enrolled in the University Community Collaborative. Following their usual format, they engaged the students in critical discussion of literature while making art together in reaction to the reading and experience. The discussions centered around *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, which, published in 1952 in the early days of the Civil Rights Movement, still feels contemporary. Students took turns reading passages aloud and Studio K.O.S. guided the discussion to connect themes from the book to historical civil rights protests and contemporary activism. Together, they drew a line through the generations, directly into the chaotic and charged moment in which they currently find themselves. The visual results of these workshops will proudly be exhibited during *Studio K.O.S.: The Continuing Legacy of Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival*.

The workshops took place remotely on a digital platform because outside their doors a deadly and highly contagious virus has swept across the world and has, for months, ravaged the US. The virus and subsequent shutdown have devastated the most vulnerable populations in the country and exacerbated existing social inequities. The thin social fabric has torn at the seams, clearly exposing flawed systemic structures and historic divisions. Protests have erupted nationwide in reaction to countless instances of deadly use-of-force by police against black people, indigenous people, and people of color. There were daily protests in Philadelphia in the weeks leading up to the workshops, many in the neighborhoods in which the students live.

Studio K.O.S. views the transfer of knowledge itself as an art medium. They chose this moment to engage young people because the information and ideas they receive will unlock potential and offer new roads forward at a pivotal moment in their lives and in our society. The artwork that emerges as a result of these interactions is an artifact of the process. It stands as a testament to the exchange of ideas and the moment of learning.

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Although perfectly suited for the challenges of 2020, this collaborative approach to making art began in the early 1980's in the South Bronx. Artist and educator Tim Rollins, frustrated by the public school system of which he was a part, started an after school art program for his most talented students. They called themselves Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival (K.O.S.). They developed a way of working that combined reading and analysis with drawing and painting. In a process they called "jamming", they would take turns reading aloud from a book while the others would draw, paint, reflect, and discuss. They made art that related to the text through the lens of their own experiences as young people of color growing up in the South Bronx, one of the most impoverished neighborhoods in one of the richest cities in the world. They would produce a large and powerful body of work that is now represented in museums and collections across the U.S. and abroad.

For many of the original participants, the collective was a catalyst that offered the space and method to develop their own creative voices and artistic practices. Many went on to pursue careers in art, music, and literature. No longer kids, Studio K.O.S. lives up to its title, equipping participants with the skills and knowledge necessary for survival.

Angel Abreu, Jorge Abreu, Robert Branch, and Nelson Ricardo Savinon now form the core of Studio K.O.S. They were among the first collaborators in the original program and have remained active in K.O.S. for over 30 years, participating in every major project since the inception. With the sudden passing of Tim Rollins in 2017, the lead role has shifted to Studio K.O.S. to continue this legacy and empower a new generation.

Studio K.O.S. plans to expand the reach of their program. Since the summer workshops in Philadelphia, they have collaborated with the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, working with young people in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder by police. Plans are also underway for future collaborations in Philadelphia, New York, and Chicago.

The exhibition features a digital installation of artwork made by the student participants in the workshops in Philadelphia and Minneapolis. Shown alongside the historical artwork of Tim Rollins & K.O.S., it shows a clear trajectory of the group's artwork and notes the distinct next chapter in their creative collaboration.