

Saturday 26.11.2016 – Sunday 30.04.2017

Beat Generation

ZKM_Lichthof 8+9

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The exhibition will open on Friday, November 25, 2016 at 7 p.m.. The press conference will be held on Thursday, November 24, 2016 at 11 a.m..

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The ZKM | Karlsruhe will be the second stage of the *Beat Generation* exhibition after the Centre Pompidou in Paris. In the last few years, the ZKM has dedicated a number of major exhibitions to the leading figures of the Beat Generation, such as William S. Burroughs and Allen Ginsberg. In this new exhibition, an overview of the literary and artistic movement, which was created at the end of the 1940s, will now be provided for the first time. If “beatniks” were viewed back then as subversive rebels, they are now perceived as actors in one of the most important cultural directions of the 20th century.

The Beat Generation was a literary and artistic movement that arose at the end of the Forties in the USA after the Second World War and in the early days of the Cold War. It scandalized the puritanical America of the McCarthy era, heralding the cultural and sexual revolution of the Sixties and the lifestyle of the younger generation. Rejecting Western technological ideals, racism and homophobia, and defending a new tribal ethic and the use of psychotropic, it directly inspired the events of May 1968, opposition to the Vietnam War, and the hippies of Berkeley and Woodstock.

The ZKM is devoting a new exhibition to the Beat movement, re-situating it in a broader context, with over 400 works: photographs, drawings, paintings, collages, films and soundtracks, encompassing New York, Paris and Tangier. Initially perceived by the dominant culture as subversive rebels, today the Beats are seen as protagonists in one of the 20th century’s most important cultural movements. Beat literary works, originally viewed with contempt and suspicion, are now considered masterpieces of American literature. The term “beat”, borrowed from street jargon, and meaning “down and out”, “poor” or “homeless”, perpetuated the romantic, bohemian myth of the lost generation.

Press Release

November 2016

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Exhibition

Duration of exhibition
Sat, Nov. 26, 2016 -
Sun, Apr. 30, 2017

Venue
ZKM_Atrium 8+9

Press contact
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Sections of the exhibition

ON THE ROAD

In early 1951, Kerouac typed a version of *On the Road* on a scroll of paper 120 feet long: an assemblage of rolls of tracing paper taped together. The combination of typewriter and scroll made it possible to develop a rhythmic style of writing dictated only by the hitting of the keys and the carriage return. But it also turned writing into an ecstatic experience: "I wrote it in one go, letting the subconscious express itself in its own way", wrote Kerouac. "I let the words flow out in uninterrupted waves, half awake, hardly knowing what I was doing except that I was writing." Producing a "sketchy" kind of spontaneous, breathless writing inspired by the prosody of jazz, the text, shored up by the mechanics of the keys, unfolds without a break, like an analogical road or rail, where the silhouette of Dean Moriarty – Neal Cassady – regularly rises up like an allegory of the travelling writer, swept along by the music's energy.

CALIFORNIA

The literary and artistic Beat scene flourished in California between 1952 and 1965, with an avant-garde, transgressed group of artists and writers whose work deeply influenced the following generations, both within and outside America. This period saw the development of a culture based on assemblage, recycling and recovery together with a "do-it-yourself" approach to techniques and media in opposition to the dominant aesthetic trends. During the California period connections and collaborations developed between artists, poets and musicians, becoming a dominant feature of Fifties and Sixties alternative culture. This section features, experimental films by Larry Jordan and Harry Smith, some examples of Wallace Berman's mail art publication, "Semina", among further photographs and collages.

NEW YORK

This part of the exhibition focuses on the birthplace of the Beat Generation. New York was where the relationship developed between music and writing, so decisive for the beat poets. This was also where they began using modern reproduction techniques, such as mimeographs, to invent a new poetic and artistic approach that went largely beyond the bohemian mythology often linked with these creators. This section paints a picture of the New York scene in all its diversity and complexity. Reviews are given a prominent place, as the Beat writers' work circulated in the pages of *Floating Bear* (edited by Diane di Prima and LeRoi Jones), *Kulchur* and Ed Sanders' *Fuck You: A Magazine for the Arts*. *Pull My Daisy*, the film based on the collective poem by Kerouac, Ginsberg and Cassady, is at the heart of this section, summarizing the spirit of collaboration in the Beat scene. Numerous drawings and oils by Jack Kerouac, whose graphic and pictorial work is

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still relatively unknown.

TANGIER

Placed under the protection of France and Spain and declared a free zone until Morocco's independence in 1956, post-war Tangier, which Burroughs turned into the labyrinthine "interzone" of *Naked Lunch*, was a haven for many writers and artists. William Burroughs rented a room at the Muniria Hotel in 1954, and was joined in early 1957 by Allen Ginsberg, Gregory Corso, Peter Orlovsky and soon after by Jack Kerouac. Paul Bowles had been living in Tangier since 1947, and Brion Gysin opened the Thousand and One Nights restaurant there in 1954, where the Master Musicians of Jajouka played every night. The exhibition highlights the influence of the trance music recorded by Paul Bowles throughout Morocco in 1959, the practice of magic, and the beats' consumption of kif while working on their literature and art. Tangier was where Burroughs developed his photomontage technique. In *Tanger* created, with the help of Jack Kerouac the base of his groundbreaking novel *Naked Lunch*, which was published two years later in Paris. Besides he developed and deepened there his photomontage technique.

MEXICO

From the early Fifties onwards, Mexico, that legendary land lying beyond the last frontier, had a particular attraction for Californian artists and Beat writers – perhaps, too, because of Antonin Artaud's stay with the Tarahumara Indians and his discovery of peyote. For Burroughs, Kerouac and many other writers of that generation, Mexico was a place both romantic and sordid; the land of peyote, violence, and magic, a combination of many themes running through their history. This section presents films by Ron Rice, and photographs by the French photographer Bernard Plossu, taken during his 1965-1966 trip through Mexico, after which, going north, he reached California at the height of the "Summer of Love".

PARIS

The last section is devoted to Paris, where several major Beat poetry texts were written at the Beat Hotel, where Allen Ginsberg, William S. Burroughs, Gregory Corso, Brion Gysin and many other American and European writers and artists stayed between 1957 and 1963. A series of photographs by Harold Chapman documents the residents' life in the hotel, where he lived for several years. The Beat Hotel was also where Anglo-Canadian writer and painter Brion Gysin invented the technique of the cut-up and cut-in (its equivalent in sound) which William S. Burroughs then used extensively in his literature. Gysin had brought back from Morocco a magical and ecstatic conception of the poetic and artistic activity he was to combine with the formalist techniques of permutation.

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We see the links between the American writer community and the French poets and avant-garde artists active at that time, such as Bernard Heidsieck, Henri Chopin, Henri Michaux and Jean-Jacques Lebel, who acted as a link between the two groups. "The Beat Generation, that was a vision that we had, John Clellon Holmes and I, and Allen Ginsberg in an even wilder way, in the late forties, of a generation of crazy, illuminated hipsters suddenly rising and roaming America, serious, bumming and hitchhiking everywhere, ragged, beatific, beautiful in an ugly graceful new way--a vision gleaned from the way we had heard the word 'beat' spoken on street corners on Times Square and in the Village, in other cities in the downtown city night of postwar America--beat, meaning down and out but full of intense conviction." Jack Kerouac: *Aftermath: The Philosophy of the Beat Generation*, Esquire, March 1958.

Artists of the exhibition

Gideon Bachmann, Bruce Baillie, Antony Balch, Amiri Baraka, Mary Beach, Wallace Berman, Paul Bowles, William F. Brown, William S. Burroughs, Paul Carroll, Neal Cassady, Harold Chapman, Henri Chopin, Eldridge Cleaver, John Cohen, Bruce Conner, Gregory Corso, Robert Creeley, Edward Dahlberg, Diane DiPrima, Allen Donald, Ed Dorn, Robert Duncan, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Marcel Fleiss, Robert Frank, Jean Genet, Allen Ginsberg, John Giorno, Peter Emanuel Goldman, Brion Gysin, Bernard Heidsieck, George Herms, Henry Jacobs, Françoise Janicot, Alain Jaubert, Ted Joans, Larry Jordan, Lenore Kandel, Jack Kerouac, Joanne Kyger, Philip Lamantia, Robert LaVigne, Jean-Jacques Lebel, Alfred Leslie, Lawrence Lipton, Christopher MacLaine, Michael McClure, Taylor Mead, David Meltzer, Harold Norse, Peter Orlovsky, Charles Olson, Kenneth Patchen, Bernard Plossu, Kenneth Rexroth, Ron Rice, Barney Rosset, Ed Sanders, Mark B. Schleifer, Charlie Shavers, Harry Smith, Snug, Gary Snyder, Ian Sommerville, Ettore Sottsass jr., Gerd Stern, The Fugs, John Tytell, Stan VanDerBeek, Anne Waldman, Joy Walsh, Alan Watts, Ruth Weiss, Robert Watts, Lew Welch, Philip Whalen, Peter Whitehead, Ray Wisniewski, John Wieners

Curators

Jean-Jacques Lebel, Philippe-Alain Michaud, Peter Weibel

Catalogue

For the exhibition in the Centre Pompidou Paris the catalogue *Beat Generation. New York San Francisco Paris*, ed. Centre Pompidou Paris, Philippe-Alain Michaud, approx. 300 p., was published in french.

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