

STUDIO K.O.S.: THE CONTINUING LEGACY OF TIM ROLLINS AND KIDS OF SURVIVAL (SELECTED WORKS FROM 1987 – 2020)

By [Mark Westall](#) • 9 February 2021



Installation shot Studio K.O.S.: The Continuing Legacy of Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival (Selected works from 1987 – 2020) Josh Gaddy Photography, courtesy of Wexler Gallery.

Wexler Gallery presents exhibition *Studio K.O.S.: The Continuing Legacy of Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival* (Selected works from 1987 – 2020). The exhibition marks the revival of Studio K.O.S., the pioneering art collective founded by Tim Rollins alongside his students in

the Bronx in the early 1980s. The exhibition showcases the historical artwork of Tim Rollins and K.O.S. alongside artwork from the contemporary practice of Studio K.O.S., who partnered with students in the summer and fall of 2020 in Philadelphia and Minneapolis to create a new video work. Guided by the unchanging principles of transcendence through collaborative art and knowledge, the two bodies of work are inextricably connected by the legacy of the movement and its present-day manifestation. 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.



Tim Rollins & Studio K.O.S. Invisible Man (after Ralph Ellison), 2014 Matte acrylic and pencil on book pages on wood panel 36 x 36 in Josh Gaddy Photography, courtesy of Wexler Gallery.

“The context of the Black Lives Matter protests and the global pandemic in 2020 served as a valuable backdrop to our work, engaging with texts and thinking alongside students as they navigate turbulent social upheaval, which mirrors our own experience as students under Tim Rollins. We view the transference of knowledge as an artistic medium in itself, this collaboration and dialogue are the foundation of K.O.S. In 2020, the information and ideas exchanged with students will unlock potential and offer new roads forward at a pivotal moment in their lives and in our society.”

states founding Studio K.O.S. member Angel Abreu.



Tim Rollins & KOS X-Men/Malcolm X (After Marvel Comics and Malcolm X), 1997
Comic book covers on book pages on rag board 9.13 x 6.02 in each 58 x 46 in (installed dimensions variable) Image by KeneK Photography
courtesy of Wexler Gallery

In July and September 2020, Studio K.O.S. led *Collaborative Workshops for Transcendence through Art and Knowledge* for selected Philadelphia area high school students enrolled in the University Community Collaborative and in partnership with the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis. Following their signature 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, is strikingly 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 in the context of the social upheaval and reckoning of the Black Lives Matter movement. The resulting artwork is a video work, a reflection of the digital interfaces through which these collaborations were made during the pandemic, that will be debuted in this exhibition.



Tim Rollins & KOS X-Men '68 – The Devil Had a Daughter!, 1991/92 Vintage comic book pages on canvas 38.25 x 33.125 x 1.625 in Image by Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zürich

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.) and 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. Together 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.



*Tim Rollins & KOS Amerika - The Missing Person (after Franz Kafka), 2012 Acrylic, watercolor, pencil, book pages on linen 60.25 x 72 in
Image by Stefan Altenburger Photography, Zürich*

Seizing the context of the social turbulence of 2020 as a catalyst, 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.



Tim Rollins & KOS Amerika The Nature Theater of Oklahoma: For Thoreau, 1987-88 Watercolor and pencil drawing on book pages mounted on linen 15 x 15 in each Image by KeneK Photography courtesy of Wexler Gallery

Studio K.O.S.: The Continuing Legacy of Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival (Selected works from 1987 – 2020) Exhibition Marks the Revival of Studio K.O.S. and Debut of New Artwork On View in Philadelphia and New York – March 20, 2021
Open by appointment: 201 North 3rd Street | Philadelphia PA 19106
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ABOUT STUDIO K.O.S.

Studio K.O.S. is a collective of artists who are continuing the legacy of Tim Rollins and the Kids of Survival (K.O.S.), whose collaborative approach to making art began in the Bronx in the early 1980's. What was manifested from their collaborations became a powerful body of work that can be seen today in more than 120 museums and public collections worldwide including MoMA, The Tate Modern and The Art Institute of Chicago. Studio K.O.S. currently consists of original members who have remained active for over 30 years. They remain dedicated to the mission of empowering young people through exposure to art and literature.