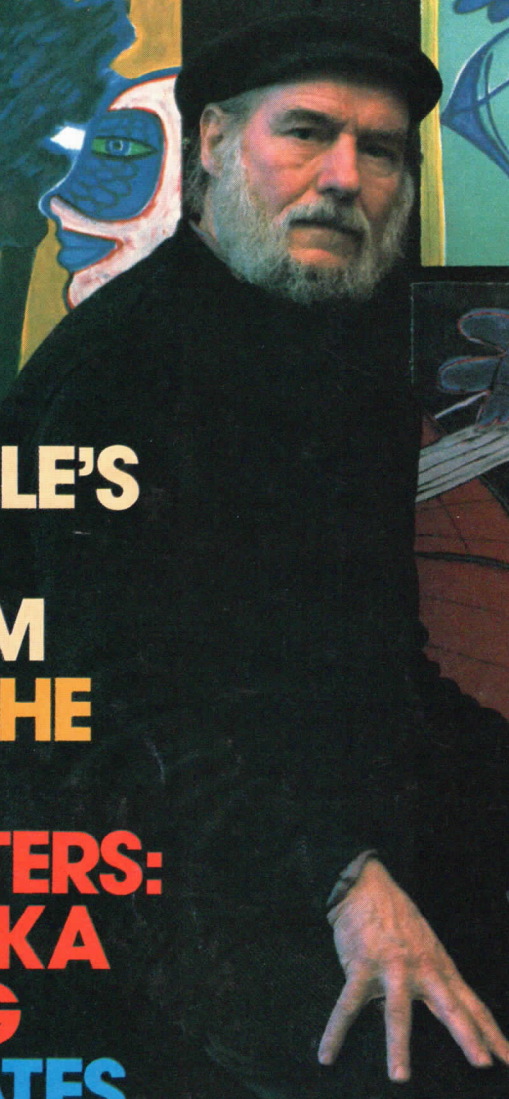


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HOLLAND HERALD



**CORNEILLE'S
ART OF
OPTIMISM
LIFE ON THE
RHINE
THE WRITERS:
DOESCHKA
MEIJSSING
GULF STATES
MEAN BUSINESS**



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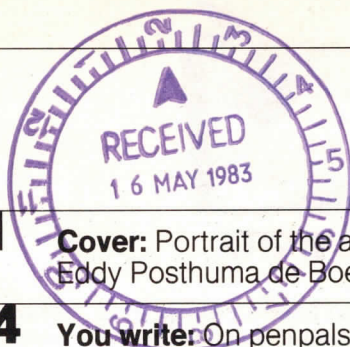
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ARTBEAT

AFTER COBRA

Hansmaarten Tromp meets the great Dutch painter Corneille whose work still exudes the liberated spirit of Cobra, the vital international art movement which formed new horizons in the late 1940s. Portrait: Eddy Posthuma de Boer

Cobra and Corneille are often mentioned in the same breath, not because their names are inseparable or because they alliterate, but because both evoke the same associations regarding colour, optimism and gaiety. It could hardly be otherwise, for although the international art movement Cobra (Copenhagen = Brussels = Amsterdam) is long dead in name, it still continues to inspire many of the artists who belonged to it, especially Corneille.

The 61-year-old artist still paints his dreams, still likes his work to be cheerful and continues to be the poetry-writing painter to whom life is more and more of an adventure involving dream female figures, fiery birds, volcanoes and talking stones. "All this has caught my attention, for a day, an hour, for a moment, my eyes always delighting in the exciting pageant of life," he wrote in 1973 referring to his series of silkscreen gouaches *The adventures of Pinocchio*. And now, ten years later, when I visit him in his studio in Paris, where he has lived since 1950, he is delighted at having become a father for the first time of a happy son.

Corneille Guillaume Beverloo was born of Dutch parents living in Liege, Belgium. Like other little boys he signed drawings with his Christian name Corneille, and has done so ever since.

At 18 he left for Amsterdam to study at the Rijksacademie voor Beeldende Kunsten, hoping to find what he later called "a free, poetic art". He was disappointed, however, partly because war was imminent but mainly because he found the atmosphere oppressive.

The war increasingly hampered Corneille in his search for creative freedom and he left the academy after a year to continue under his own steam, like his friend Karel Appel who also fled the school. "I went to Paris with Appel," he says, "and it was an inspiring experience for both of us. We got to know the work of Dubuffet; at that time his graphic work was considered quite obscene and caused a scandal in the press. As for me, I felt as if I were painting for the first time in my

life. I worked day and night. I was obsessed by the vividness that can be produced by colours."

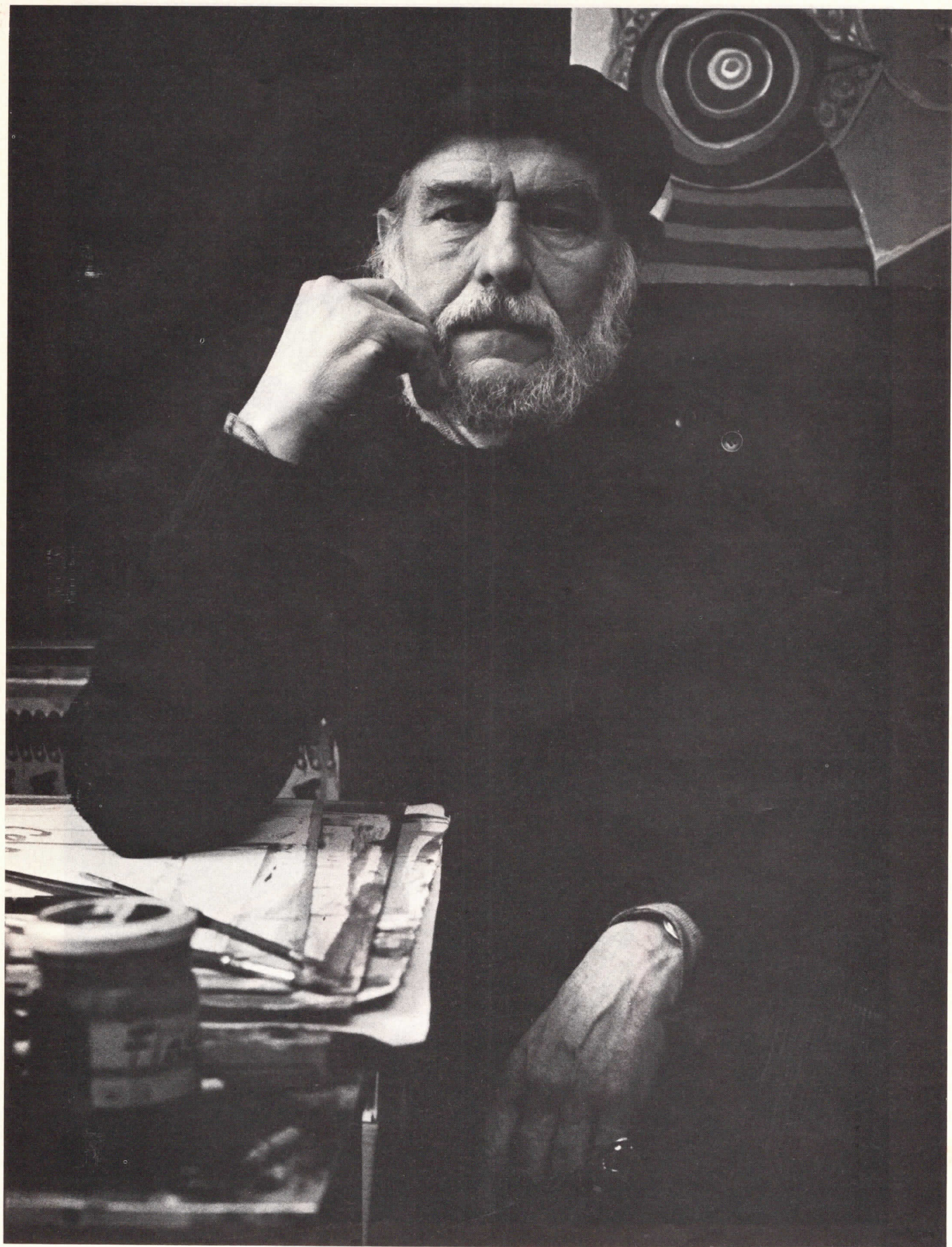
Back in Amsterdam, Corneille and Appel had their first exhibition in a gallery: oil paintings of figures, still lifes, landscapes. After the exhibition, however, Corneille needed a barrow to cart away the paintings he had hoped to sell. But on the way back to his small studio, he had one of the chance encounters that proved significant in his life: an old lady saw the paintings in Corneille's barrow, was enthusiastic about his work and invited him to have an exhibition in Budapest. Corneille did not need to be asked twice and a few weeks later he was on the banks of the Danube. The trip was an eye-opener; in a little bookshop he became acquainted with the poetry of Rimbaud and Lautréamont and discovered surrealism. He also met the French painter Jacques Doucet and got to know the work of Joan Miró and Paul Klee whose work made such an impression on him that he followed his footsteps to Tunisia a few years later.

"Klee was one of my gods," he says now, "I worshipped him. And in my opinion it was in Tunis that he did his finest work which kept him going for years, like someone who lives on a hoard of food for years." And just as Klee was fascinated by North African abstract motifs, ideograms which in fact are very closely related to Tunisian daily life, Corneille in turn discovered the strength of colour in the fierce sun on the parched ground: soft sandy-brown, canary-yellow and sun-red with its fan-like rays. He painted for hours on end, thinking up titles like *There's still room to play in the heart of the desert* – poetic marginal notes to his simple, childlike paintings. Corneille's drawing developed the spontaneity characteristic of children's drawings. A few years later this was to become an important element in the work of the experimental painters who met in the Café de l' Hôtel Notre Dame and founded the Cobra movement, which was disbanded three years later. In this period Corneille's work was dominated

by the forces and passions of nature, by her just dynamic laws that always find release in apparent chaos. At this time too he was preoccupied with "a nascent world in which things have not yet developed into objects". The colours and lines in his work appeared in dynamic harmony as, for example, in *The lively rhythm of the city*, whereby he gave playful expression to the reality of the outside world and the fantasy of his inner experience, while borrowing from the vocabulary developed by Paul Klee in his search for an autonomous art.

"People are always surprised that Cobra lasted for such a short time," he says, adjusting the beret he wears with typical French panache. "But you mustn't forget that we'd just been through the war when we founded Cobra. The war terrified us, we all wanted to come out of it unhurt and had to bottle up our energy while it lasted. For us Cobra was a kind of liberation fever which flared up fiercely. We were an international group of painters and writers who joined forces in Cobra. At present there are not so many groups of artists joining together, it is more a question of individual artists working very hard. I really admire them, after all it's wonderful that there are still creative individuals who dare throw themselves into the stream of art and rely on their talent to keep them afloat."

When Cobra disbanded, Corneille also continued as an individual artist, apparently having emerged from the Cobra school intact. He became increasingly astonished at the world and his paintings were more and more exuberant celebrations of form and colour. "My earlier work is grey compared with the paintings I make now," he says laughing loudly. "I love life and this is reflected in my work. I want it to be like bird song: spontaneous, free and uncomplicated. And I'm not the sort of painter who spends all his time in seclusion. Dynamic city life, my love of women, enjoyment of travel, meeting new people and seeing other cultures, I take enormous delight in expressing all these things in my work."





Tête dans un jardin, 1950



L'oiseau arlequin, 1980