

Tim Rollins + K.O.S

(Pittsfield, Maine, 1955)

An artist and teacher assigned to a school in the Bronx (New York), Tim Rollins transformed his educational activity with young people into an innovative artistic process that succeeded in inserting itself energetically within the art system. Formerly a member of the art collective Group Material, in 1984 Rollins launched the “Art and Knowledge Workshop” initiative, a laboratory where the study of classic works of literature and music and research of new forms of visual representation catalyzed the attention of young students between the ages of eleven and eighteen, predominantly Hispanic and African-American, from public schools in the south Bronx, a neighborhood then marked by unemployment and social tensions. Based on a method that insists on the values of dialogue and exchange within the context of a community, The Tim Rollins + K.O.S. team - the acronym for Kids of Survival that the students themselves chose for their group - quickly received critical and public attention, resulting in exhibitions in top Soho galleries and, through the sale of works to private collectors and important museums, earning proceeds that were earmarked for financing the young members’ academic education.

The team has drawn on literary lights such as Daniel Defoe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Franz Kafka, Herman Melville, and Mark Twain, in numerous series of works, also expanding their creative process to respond to the music of Joseph Haydn, Franz Schubert, and Richard Strauss. The work in the collection, *By Any Means Necessary (After Malcolm X)*, 2010, is part of a long process of in-depth study of the autobiography of Malcolm X, which began in 1985. Rectangular in format, the work is characterized by thick strips of black paint in which the initials “M” and “X” can be identified, decomposed and intersecting with each other. A thin layer of white paint, instead, secures the sequence of the numerous pages of the book, used as a background, sometimes legible, at other times hidden by the dense black material. A close-up examination of the work reveals that the team concentrated on “Detroit Red” and “Hustler,” respectively chapters 6 and 7 of the original work, where the author wrote about the difficult years he experienced in environments dominated by illegal gambling, theft, and drug trafficking. (MB)