SERPENTINE

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Press Release, 19 November 2026

PIERRE ALECHINSKY

In Paperland

Serpentine to present a major solo exhibition of Pierre Alechinsky, the last surviving member of the avant-garde movement Cobra, in his 100th year.

At Serpentine South
11 February – 18 April 2027
Press View: Wednesday 10 February 2027, 9am–12pm
Please RSVP to: press@serpentinegalleries.org



Left: Pierre Alechinsky, *Central Park*, 1965. Acrylic with marginal drawings in Indian ink on paper mounted on canvas, 162 x 193 cm. Photo: André Morain. © Pierre Alechinsky. Right: Pierre Alechinsky, Bougival, 2012. Photo: Michel Nguyen.

Serpentine is delighted to announce *In Paperland*, a major solo exhibition of visionary artist Pierre Alechinsky (b. 1927, Brussels, Belgium; lives and works in Bougival, France), the last surviving member of the hugely influential European avant-garde movement, Cobra. Conceived in close dialogue with the artist and marking his 100th birthday, this landmark survey is the artist's first major solo presentation in a UK public institution in over sixty years.

For over eight decades, Alechinsky has created a rich body of paintings and works on paper that are characterised by a bold, spontaneous and expressive pictorial language. Combining organic shapes, anthropomorphic figures, surreal landscapes and imaginary creatures, Alechinsky

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frequently incorporates calligraphic marks and gestural brushstrokes that engage with the history of painting, printmaking and drawing. On view at Serpentine South from 11 February to 18 April 2027, the exhibition spans six decades of Alechinsky's practice, from the 1960s to the 2010s. Featuring around fifty works, including rarely seen Indian ink drawings and all-over painterly configurations in acrylic, the exhibition charts the evolution of one of the most inventive and experimental voices in post-war modern art.

In celebration of his radical creativity and experimentation, *In Paperland* underscores Alechinsky's enduring influence, including on the artist Keith Haring (1958–1990) who, after discovering Alechinsky's work in Pittsburgh in 1977, commented: "Alechinsky totally blew me away. From that point on, it changed everything for me."[i] Matt Copson (b. 1992), whose solo exhibition will be presented at Serpentine North in Spring and Summer 2027, is also deeply influenced by Alechinsky, in particular the use of cartoonish forms rendered in gestural mark-marking inspired by children's drawings and comics, saturated colour and language.

This exhibition continues Serpentine's longstanding commitment to spotlighting ground-breaking pioneers and innovators whose work deserves greater visibility in the UK. In recent years, Serpentine has presented major solo exhibitions by Faith Ringgold (2019); Luchita Hurtado (2019); James Barnor (2021); Hervé Télémaque (2021); and Barbara Chase-Riboud (2022), among others.

Pierre Alechinsky said: "I came to painting through printing. Showing at Serpentine in 2027 means a great deal to me. I'm delighted that these works will be presented together, and that audiences will see them in this context for the first time."

Bettina Korek, CEO, Serpentine, and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, Serpentine, said: "Pierre Alechinsky turns 100 in 2027, and we are honoured to mark this milestone with a solo exhibition of his work at Serpentine South. Celebrating the last surviving member of the Cobra movement[ii], Alechinsky has been closely involved in shaping every aspect of the show and its accompanying catalogue. *In Paperland* will explore key themes in his practice, from his enduring dialogue with poetry and literature, as well as his exchanges and collaborations with fellow artists, writers and thinkers. We are particularly delighted that the trailblazing feminist writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous, and close friend of Alechinsky, will offer fresh insights into his work through an extraordinary text published in English for the first time in the catalogue. Marking Alechinsky's first major solo presentation at a UK public institution in more than six decades, the exhibition reflects Serpentine's ongoing commitment to championing pioneering artists and bringing renewed recognition to their work."

Highlights of the exhibition include *Central Park* (1965), an important work that was selected by André Breton (1896–1966) to be included in the 11th International Surrealism Exhibition in December 1965, which marks Alechinsky's transition from working with oil to acrylic paint. This work exemplifies his signature 'marginal remarks' technique, in which a central image is framed by smaller graphic line drawings. Here, a vibrant and expressive vision of New York City's Central

Park is transformed into “the maw of a debonaire monster devouring yellow cabs and pedestrians.” This framing device evokes both comic strips and predella panels of medieval and Renaissance art, where black-and-white vignettes serve as surreal, parallel narratives. Additional works such as *Journal déplié I* and *Journal déplié II* (Folded Journal I and II) (both 1966), further demonstrate Alechinsky’s exploration of ink as well as his ability to fuse Eastern and Western artistic traditions. The exhibition will also include monumental acrylic compositions that expand on his use of ‘marginal remarks’ including *Ultramarine* (1973–2015) and *Le Passé inaperçu* (*The Unnoticed Past*) (1981), among others.

In 1949, Alechinsky became an active member of Cobra – a collective art movement whose name was derived from the founding members’ home cities: Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam. Active between 1948 and 1951, the group was founded by, and comprised of, poets and artists including Christian Dotremont (1922–1979) and Asger Jorn (1914–1973), among others.

Seeking to break away from the perceived ‘sterility’ of abstraction and rigidity of intellectualism that dominated Western art in the aftermath of two World Wars, Cobra drew inspiration from prehistoric and folk art, graffiti, mythology, children’s drawings and the work of artists who operated outside of formal academic institutions, advocating for a visual language that was direct, instinctive and liberating.

For Alechinsky, the movement’s youngest member and a key organiser of its publications and exhibitions, Cobra represented “a total opposition to the calculations of cold abstraction [...] and to all forms of split between free thought and the action of painting freely.” Following the movement’s disbandment in 1951, Alechinsky moved to Paris to study engraving at the experimental art school Atelier 17, carrying forward the movement’s radical and experimental spirit. In the 1950’s, Alechinsky began corresponding with Japanese artist Morita Shiryū (1912–1998). A formative trip to Japan in 1955 to meet Shiryū and study the work of the avant garde collective, Bokujinkai, who advanced calligraphy in Japan and internationally, marked a turning point in his practice. Embracing the fluidity and spontaneity of Japanese calligraphy, he began incorporating its techniques into his work. This cross-cultural exchange would profoundly shape his dense and vividly animated compositions in the years that followed.

The exhibition will highlight Alechinsky’s cross-disciplinary practice, drawing on his early training in typography and book illustration, as well as countless collaborations with artists, writers and philosophers. Often working with found manuscripts, accountancy ledgers, maps and legal documents, he creates multi-layered compositions infused with humour and lyricism. Works such as *La Première heure* (The First Hour) (1968–1974), which incorporates ink drawings on Michel Butor’s (1926–2016) typescripts, and *Dépeindre, décrire* (Dispaint, Describe) (1979) exemplify this approach. The exhibition also explores recurring motifs in Alechinsky’s work, including a suite of watercolours that feature volcanic imagery, while later works such as *Eclipse* (1987) and *Réseau romain* (Roman Network) (1989) demonstrate his use of frottage and stamping.

To accompany the exhibition, a major monograph will be co-published by Serpentine and Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther und Franz König, Köln. Designed by Philippe Ducat, this generously illustrated publication will feature an extensive text by the acclaimed French feminist philosopher and writer Hélène Cixous (b. 1937), who has had a long-standing artistic and literary relationship and friendship with Alechinsky for over three decades. The text, titled *Alechinsky, or The Root's Journey*, has been published in English for the first time. The catalogue also features contributions by the late surrealist poet Joyce Mansour (1928–1936), a conversation between Alechinsky and Serpentine's Artistic Director, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and an extensive chronology compiled by Serpentine's Exhibition Curator, Chris Bayley.

In Paperland will also be accompanied by a digital guide accessible via the Bloomberg Connects app. It will feature a specially commissioned video interview between Serpentine's Artistic Director, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hélène Cixous, who will reflect on her relationship and perspective of Alechinsky's work. Further contributions will include, artists Matt Copson, Keith Haring and Camille Henrot, poet and writer Ivan Alechine, as well as a rarely seen film of Alechinsky in his studio by Ulysse Dikoumé Alechinsky.

Pierre Alechinsky: In Paperland is curated in close dialogue with the artist by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director and Chris Bayley, Exhibitions Curator, with Liz Stumpf, Assistant Exhibitions Curator. Special thanks to Frédéric Charron.

NOTES TO EDITORS

About Pierre Alechinsky

Born in Brussels, Belgium, in 1927, Pierre Alechinsky studied typography and book illustration before turning to painting and joining Jeune Peinture Belge (The Young Belgian Painting Association). Since 1951, he has lived and worked in France. His work has been exhibited internationally with solo exhibitions at Fondation Boghossian, Brussels, Belgium (2024); Musées royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Bruxelles, Belgium (2021 and 2007); Centre Pompidou, Málaga, Spain (2019); the Museums of Osaka and Tokyo, Japan (2016–17); Círculo de Bellas Artes, Madrid, Spain (2015); Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, France (2010); BNF, Paris, France (2005); Collection d'art graphique du Centre Pompidou, Paris, France (2004); Centre de la gravure et de l'image imprimée, La Louvière, Belgium (2000); Institut Valencià d'Art Modern, Valencia, Spain (2000); Jeu de Paume, Paris, France (1998); Guggenheim, New York, USA (1986); MoMA, New York, USA (1981); Carnegie Museum (formerly Carnegie Institute), Pittsburgh, USA (1977); Kunsthaus Zürich, Switzerland (1975); Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebaek, Denmark (1969); Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands (1963); and the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London, UK (1958).

His work has been included in numerous international group exhibitions and biennales, including the 1972 Venice Biennale where he represented Belgium, together with Christian Dotremont. His work is held in the collections of Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes (MNBA), Buenos Aires, Argentina; Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, Belgium; Museu de Arte Contemporânea da

Universidade de São Paulo (MAC USP), São Paulo, Brazil; Centre Pompidou, National Museum of Modern Art/Centre for Industrial Creation, Paris, France; Bibliothèque nationale de France - BnF, Paris, France; Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris, France; Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice, Italy; Museo Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico; Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, the Netherlands; Tate, London, UK; Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA), USA; Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), New York, USA; and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, USA, among many others. In 2018, he received the Praemium Imperiale Prize, Tokyo, Japan.

Limited Edition

On the occasion of the exhibition, a new limited edition etching featuring Alechinsky's volcanic imagery will be released, produced exclusively for Serpentine in France by Alechinsky's long-term collaborators Éditions RLD.

For more information, please contact editions@serpentinegalleries.org.

About Serpentine

Building new connections between artists and audiences, Serpentine, led by Bettina Korek, CEO and Hans Ulrich Obrist, Artistic Director, presents pioneering contemporary art exhibitions and cultural events with a legacy that stretches back over half a century, from a wide range of emerging practitioners to the most internationally recognised artists, writers, scientists, thinkers, and cultural thought leaders of our time.

Based in London's Kensington Gardens, Serpentine features a year-round, free programme of exhibitions, architectural showcases, education, live events and technological activations across two sites, Serpentine North and Serpentine South, in the park and beyond the gallery walls.

Public art has emerged as a central strand of Serpentine's programme. Major presentations include a collection of Eduardo Paolozzi's sculptures (1987); Anish Kapoor's *Turning the World Upside Down (*2010); Lee Ufan's *Relatum – Stage (*2018–19); Christo and Jeanne-Claude's *London Mastaba* in the Serpentine Lake (2018); *I LOVE YOU EARTH* by Yoko Ono (2021); Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's *In remembrance of the coming alien (Alienor)* (2022); Atta Kwami's *DzidzƆ kple amenuveve* (Joy and Grace) (2021–22); Gerhard Richter's *STRIP-TOWER* (2023); Yayoi Kusama's *Pumpkin* (2024); Esther Mahlangu's mural *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (2024–26); Giuseppe Penone's *Albero folgorato* (Thunderstruck Tree) (2012) and *Idee di pietra* (Ideas of Stone), 2010–2024 (2025); David Hockney's *A Year in Normandie* (detail) (2026); and Jesús Rafael Soto's *Pénétrable BBL Jaune* (1999; 2023 Edition).

Proud to maintain free access for all visitors, Serpentine reaches an exceptionally broad audience and maintains a profound connection with its local community.

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[i] John Gruen, *Keith Haring: The Authorized Biography* (London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1991), pp. 28–29.
[ii] Often stylised as 'CoBrA'.