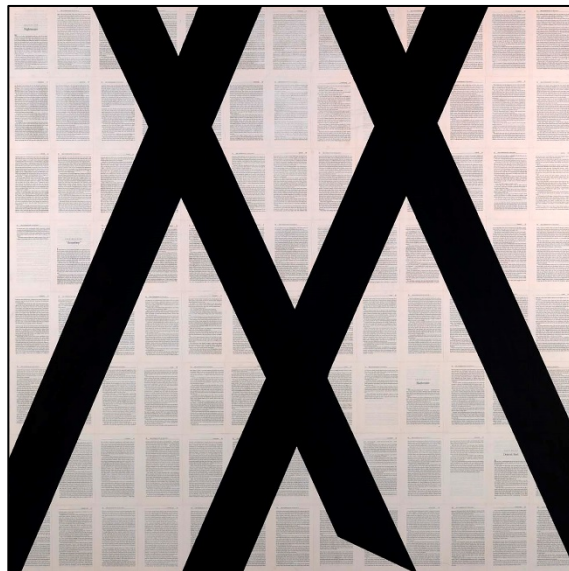


Activity: Observe and Interpret

Artist make choices in communicating ideas. What information can we learn about Malcom X, his ideas, and their influence today from this painting? What clues do Tim Rollins and K.O.S. give us? Observing details and analyzing components of the painting, then putting them in historical context, enables the viewer to interpret the overall message of the work of art.

Observation: What do you see?

What do you notice about the bold black lines that crisscross the image?



By Any Means Necessary (after Malcolm X), 2008, Tim Rollins and K.O.S.

Four thick diagonal lines form both the letter “M” and three “X”s across the painting. The “M” and “X” represent the initials of Malcolm X. While three lines seem to continue beyond the canvas, one line ends in a sharp, scalpel-like point at the bottom edge of the work.

What do you see in the background?

Wallpapering the painting beneath the black diagonals lie eight rows of sequential book pages. Collaged onto the surface of the canvas are chapter’s one through six of the *Autobiography of Malcolm X (As Told to Alex Haley)*. These chapters focus on Malcolm X’s early years – his childhood in Michigan and early adulthood in Boston and Harlem.

Interpretation: What does it mean?

Malcolm X was a powerful figure in the Civil Rights movement. His autobiography documents his life and the evolution of his views about how African Americans should overcome oppression and exploitation. The title of the painting, *By Any Means Necessary*, is a quote often used by Malcolm in public speeches to challenge his listeners to organize and take action to gain their rights, respect and freedom: “We want freedom by any means necessary. We want justice by any means necessary. We want equality by any means necessary.” This quote was

used in one of his last speeches at the Ford Auditorium in Detroit on February 14, 1965 the day his home was firebombed and only days before his was shot and killed at the Audubon Ballroom in New York.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X (as told to Alex Haley), published in 1965, was banned from many high schools during the height of Civil Rights movement for its controversial promotion of racial equality through violence. The black lines crossing over the text in the painting function both as a monogram for Malcolm X, and as censors to the text. The sharp ending of one of the four lines creates a visual symmetry that indicates a disruption. Does it reflect the abrupt ending of Malcolm X's life? Could it indicate Malcolm's intent to break the cycle of social injustice by the use of sharper tactics?

The artists who created this work are Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival, or K.O.S. Rollins first formed K.O.S. with a group of high school students he was working with while teaching in the South Bronx. Many of the works of Rollin and K.O.S. focus on reading literary classics, exploring their meaning and connections to contemporary life, and deconstructing them in the process of creating a new visual interpretation of the piece.