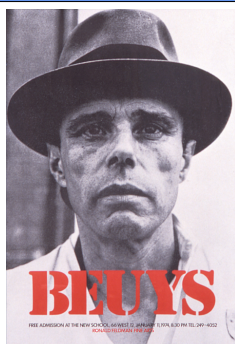


Joseph Beuys

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Offset poster for Beuys' 1974 US lecture-series "Energy Plan for the Western Man", organised by Ronald Feldman Gallery - Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York

Born	May 12, 1921Krefeld, Germany
Died	January 23, 1986 (aged 64)Düsseldorf
Nationality	German
Field	Performances, sculpture, visual art, aesthetics, social philosophy
Training	Kunstakademie Düsseldorf

Joseph Beuys (German pronunciation: [ˈjoːzɛf ˈbɔʏs]; May 12, 1921, Krefeld – January 23, 1986, Düsseldorf) was a German performance artist, sculptor, installation artist, graphic artist, art theorist and pedagogue of art.

His extensive work is grounded in concepts of humanism, social philosophy and anthroposophy; it culminates in his "extended definition of art" and the idea of social sculpture as a *gesamtkunstwerk*, for which he claimed a creative, participatory role in shaping society and politics. His career was characterized by passionate, even acrimonious public debate, but he is now regarded as one of the most influential artists of the 20th century.^{[1] [2]}

Biography

Childhood and early life in the Third Reich (1921-1941)

Joseph Beuys was the son of the merchant Josef Jakob Beuys (1888–1958) and Johanna Maria Margarete Beuys (born Hülsermann, 1889–1974). The parents had moved from Geldern to Krefeld in 1910, and Beuys was born there on May 12, 1921. In autumn of that year the family moved to Kleve, an industrial town in the Lower Rhine region of Germany, close to the Dutch border. There, Joseph attended primary school (*Katholische Volksschule*) and secondary/high- school (*Staatliches Gymnasium Cleve*, now the *Freiherr-vom-Stein-Gymnasium*). His teachers considered him to have a talent for drawing; he also took piano- and cello lessons. On several occasions he visited the studio of the Flemish painter and sculptor Achilles Moortgat. Other interests of note include Nordic history and mythology and especially the natural sciences. According to his own account, when the Nazi Party staged their book-burning in Kleve on May 19, 1933 in the courtyard of his school, he salvaged the book *Systema Naturae* by Carl Linnaeus "...from that large, flaming pile".^[3]

As of 1936, Beuys' membership in the Hitler Youth is documented; the organization comprised a large majority of German children and adolescents at that time and later that year membership became compulsory. He participated in the Nuremberg rally in September 1936, when he was 15 years old.^[4]

From an early age, Beuys displayed a keen interest in the natural sciences and had considered a career in medical studies, but in his last years of school - possibly influenced by pictures of Wilhelm Lehmbruck's sculptures^[5] - he

had decided to become a sculptor himself. Around 1939 he worked for a circus on the side, postering and taking care of animals for about a year.^[6] He graduated from school in the spring of 1941 with his Abitur.

WW II (1941-1945)

In 1941, Beuys volunteered for the Luftwaffe.^[7] He began his military training as an aircraft radio operator in 1941, under the tutelage of Heinz Sielmann in Posen (now Poznań) and they both attended lectures in Biology and Zoology at the University of Posen, at that time a Germanized University. It is also during this time that he began to seriously consider a career as an artist.

In 1942 Beuys was stationed in the Crimea and was a member of various combat bomber units. From 1943 on he was deployed as rear-gunner in the Ju 87 "Stuka" dive-bomber, initially stationed in Königgrätz, later in the eastern Adriatic region. Drawings and sketches from that time have been preserved and already show his characteristic style.^[3] On 16 March 1944 Beuys's plane was shot down on the Crimean Front and crashed close to Znamianka, (then "Freiberg"). Beuys's subsequent recount (1979) of the event became one of the most controversial aspects of his artistic persona. He claimed to have been rescued from the crash by nomadic Tatar tribesmen, who had wrapped his broken body in animal fat and felt and nursed him back to health:

"Had it not been for the Tartars I would not be alive today. They were the nomads of the Crimea, in what was then no man's land between the Russian and German fronts, and favoured neither side. I had already struck up a good relationship with them, and often wandered off to sit with them. 'Du nix njemcky' they would say, 'du Tartar,' and try to persuade me to join their clan. Their nomadic ways attracted me of course, although by that time their movements had been restricted. Yet it was they who discovered me in the snow after the crash, when the German search parties had given up. I was still unconscious then and only came round completely after twelve days or so, and by then I was back in a German field hospital. So the memories I have of that time are images that penetrated my consciousness. The last thing I remember was that it was too late to jump, too late for the parachutes to open. That must have been a couple of seconds before hitting the ground. Luckily I was not strapped in – I always preferred free movement to safety belts... My friend was strapped in and he was atomized on impact – there was almost nothing to be found of him afterwards. But I must have shot through the windscreen as it flew back at the same speed as the plane hit the ground and that saved me, though I had bad skull and jaw injuries. Then the tail flipped over and I was completely buried in the snow. That's how the Tartars found me days later. I remember voices saying 'Voda' (Water), then the felt of their tents, and the dense pungent smell of cheese, fat and milk. They covered my body in fat to help it regenerate warmth, and wrapped it in felt as an insulator to keep warmth in."^[8]

While apparent eyewitnesses acknowledge that the pilot died shortly after the crash, they note that Beuys was conscious, recovered by a German search commando, and there were no Tatars in the village at that time.^[9] Beuys was brought to a military hospital where he stayed for three weeks from March 17 to April 7.^[10] It is not inconsistent with Beuys' work that his biography would have been subject to his own reinterpretation;^[11] this particular story has served as a powerful myth of origins for Beuys's artistic identity, as well as providing an initial interpretive key to his use of unconventional materials, amongst which felt and fat were central. Like emerging from Aristotle's cave with a new understanding of the world, Beuys emerged from the Tatars, in his own mind, with an understanding of how he could use raw materials to create art that was both a reflection of himself and of his society.

Despite prior injuries, he was deployed to the Western Front in August 1944, into a poorly equipped and trained paratrooper unit.^[3] He received the German Wound Badge in gold for being wounded in action more than five times. On the day after the German unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945, Beuys was taken prisoner in Cuxhaven and brought to a British internment camp from which he was released August 5 of that year. He returned to his parents who had moved to a suburb of Kleve.

Studies and beginnings (1945-1960)

After his return to Kleve Beuys met the local sculptor Walter Brück and painter Hanns Lamers, who encouraged him to take up art as a full-time career. He joined the Kleve Artists Association that had been established by Brück and Lamers. On April 1, 1946 Beuys enrolled in the "Monumental Sculpture" program at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts. Initially assigned to the class of Joseph Enseling, with a traditional, representational focus^[3] he successfully applied to change his mentor after three semesters and joined the small class of Ewald Mataré in 1947, who had rejoined the academy the preceding year, after having been banned by the Nazis in 1939. The anthroposophic philosophy of Rudolf Steiner became an increasingly important basis for Beuys' reasoning, in his view it is: "... an approach that refers to reality in a direct and practical way, and that by comparison, all forms of epistemological discourse remain without direct relevance to current trends and movements".^[3] Reaffirming his interest in science, Beuys re-established contact with Heinz Sielmann and assisted with a number of nature- and wildlife documentaries in the region between 1947 and 1949.

In 1951, Mataré accepted Beuys into his master class.^[12] where he shared a studio with Erwin Heerich^(German) that he kept until 1954, a year after graduation. Nobel laureate Günter Grass recalls Beuys' influence in Mataré's class as shaping "a Christian anthroposophic atmosphere".^[13] He read Joyce, impressed by the "Irish-mythological elements" in his works,^[3] the German romantics Novalis and Friedrich Schiller, and studied Galilei and Leonardo - whom he admired as examples of artists and scientists who are conscious of their position in society and who work accordingly.^[3] Early shows include participations in the Kleve Artists Association annual exhibition in Kleve's Villa Koekoek where Beuys showed aquarelles and sketches, a solo show at the home of Hans^(German) and Franz Joseph van der Grinten^(German) in Kranenburg and a show in the Von der Heydt Museum in Wuppertal.

Beuys finished his education in 1953, graduating as master student from Mataré's class, 32 years old at that time. He had a modest income from a number of crafts-oriented commissions: a gravestone and several pieces of furniture. Throughout the 1950s, Beuys struggled with a dire financial situation and with the trauma of his wartime experiences. His output consisted mainly of drawings, which he produced in the thousands, but he also produced some sculptures. Through his drawing practice, Beuys explored a range of unconventional materials and developed his artistic agenda, exploring metaphorical and symbolic connections between natural phenomena and philosophical systems. Often difficult to interpret in themselves, these drawings constitute a speculative, contingent and rather hermetic exploration of the material world and how that world might be connected to the realm of myth and philosophy. In 1974, 327 drawings, the majority of which were made during the late 1940s and 1950s, were collected into a group entitled *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland* (a reference to Joyce), and exhibited in Oxford, Edinburgh, Dublin and Belfast.

In 1956, artistic self-doubt and material impoverishment led to a physical and psychological crisis, and Beuys entered a period of serious depression. He recovered at the house of his most important early patrons, the van der Grinten brothers, in Kranenburg. In 1958, Beuys participated in an international competition for an Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial, but his proposal did not win and his design was never realised. Also in 1958, Beuys begins a cycle of drawings related to Joyce's *Ulysses*. Completed in ca. 1961, the six exercise books of drawings would constitute, Beuys declared, an extension of Joyce's seminal novel. In 1959 Beuys married Eva Wurmbach. They had two children together, Wenzel (born 1961) and Jessyka (born 1964).

Academia and public (1960 - 1975)

In 1961 Beuys was appointed professor of 'monumental sculpture' at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. His students were artists like Katharina Sieverding, Jörg Immendorff, Blinky Palermo, Peter Angermann, Elias Maria Reti, Walter Dahn and Friederike Weske.

What served to launch Beuys into the public consciousness was that which transpired following his performance at the Technical College Aachen in 1964. As part of a festival of new art coinciding with the 20th anniversary of an assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler, Beuys created a performance or Aktion. The performance was interrupted by a group of students, one of whom attacked Beuys, punching him in the face. A photograph of the artist, nose bloodied and arm raised, was circulated in the media. It was for this 1964 festival that Beuys produced an idiosyncratic CV, which he titled *Lebenslauf/Werklauf* (Life Course/Work Course). The document was a self-consciously fictionalised account of the artist's life, in which historical events mingle with metaphorical and mythical speech (he refers to his birth as the 'Exhibition of a wound;' he claims his Ulysses Extension to have been carried out 'at James Joyce's request' – impossible, given that the writer was, by 1961, long dead). This document marks a blurring of fact and fiction that was to be characteristic of Beuys' self-created persona, as well as the source of much controversy (although, significantly, there is no mention here of the famous plane crash).

Beuys manifested his social philosophical ideas in abolishing entry requirements to his Düsseldorf class. Throughout the late 1960s this renegade policy caused great institutional friction, which came to a head in October 1972 when Beuys was dismissed from his post. The dismissal, which Beuys refused to accept, produced a wave of protests from students, artists and critics. Although now bereft of an institutional position, Beuys continued an intense schedule of public lectures and discussions, as well as becoming increasingly active in German politics. Despite this dismissal, the walkway on the academy's side of the Rhine bears Beuys as its namesake. Later in life, Beuys became a visiting professor at various institutions (1980–1985).

Teaching Philosophy

"The most important discussion is epistemological in character," stated Beuys, demonstrating his desire for continuous intellectual exchange. Beuys attempted to apply philosophical concepts to his pedagogical practice. Beuys' Aktion, "How to explain pictures to a dead hare," exemplifies a performance that is especially relevant to the pedagogical field because it deals with "the difficulty of explaining things".^[14] The artist spent three hours explaining his art to a dead hare with his head covered with honey and gold leaf and Ulmer (2007) argues not only the honey on the head but the hare itself is a model of thinking, of man embodying his ideas in forms (Ulmer, 2007, p. 236). Contemporary movements such as performance art may be considered 'laboratories' for a new pedagogy since "research and experiment have replaced form as the guiding force" (Ulmer, 2007, p. 233).

During an *Artform* interview with Willoughby Sharp in 1969, Beuys added to his famous statement - "teaching is my greatest work of art" - that "the rest is the waste product, a demonstration. If you want to express yourself you must present something tangible. But after awhile this has only the function of a historic document. Objects aren't very important any more. I want to get to the origin of matter, to the thought behind it."^[15] Beuys saw his role of an artist as a teacher or shaman who could guide society in a new direction (Sotheby's catalog, 1992^[16]).

At the Düsseldorf Academy of Art. Beuys did not impose his artistic style or techniques on his students; in fact, he kept much of his work and exhibitions hidden from the classroom because he wanted his students to explore their own interests, ideas, and talents.^[17] Beuys' actions were somewhat contradictory: while he was extremely strict about certain aspects of classroom management and instruction, such as punctuality and the need for students to take draughtsmanship classes, he encouraged his students to freely set their own artistic goals without having to prescribe to set curricula.^[18] Another aspect of Beuys' pedagogy included open "ring discussions," where Beuys and his students discussed political and philosophical issues of the day, including the role of art, democracy, and the university in society. Some of Beuys' ideas espoused in class discussion and in his art-making included free art education for all, the discovery of creativity in everyday life, and the belief that "everyone [was] an artist."^[19] Beuys himself encouraged peripheral activity and all manner of expression to emerge during the course of these

discussions.^[20] While some of Beuys' students enjoyed the open discourse of the Ringgesprache, others, including Palermo and Immendorf, disapproved of the classroom disorder, anarchic characteristics, eventually rejecting his methods and philosophies altogether.^[21]

Beuys also advocated taking art outside of the boundaries of the (art) system and to open it up to multiple possibilities bringing creativity into all areas of life. His nontraditional and anti-establishment pedagogical practice and philosophy made him the focus of much controversy and in order to battle the policy of "restricted entry" under which only a few select students were allowed to attend art classes, he deliberately allowed students to over-enroll in his courses (Anastasia Shartin,^[22]), true to his belief those who have something to teach and those who have something to learn should come together. According to Cornelia Lauf (1992), "in order to implement his idea, as well as a host of supporting notions encompassing cultural and political concepts, Beuys crafted a charismatic artistic persona that infused his work with mystical overtones and led him to be called "shaman" and "messianic" in the popular press."

Beuys: The Artist as Shaman

Beuys had adopted shamanism not only as his presentation mode of his art but also in his own life. Although the artist as a shaman has been a trend in modern art (Picasso, Gauguin), Beuys is unusual in that respect as he integrated "his art and his life into the shaman role."^[23] Beuys believed that humanity, with its turn on rationality, was trying to eliminate "emotions" and thus eliminate a major source of energy and creativity in every individual. In his first lecture tour in America he was telling the audience that humanity was in an evolving state and that as "spiritual" beings we ought to draw on both our emotions and our thinking as they represent the total energy and creativity for every individual. Beuys described how we must seek out and energize our spirituality and link it to our thinking powers so that "our vision of the world must be extended to encompass all the invisible energies with which we have lost contact."^[24] In Beuys's own words,

"So when I appear as a kind of shamanistic figure, or allude to it, I do it to stress my belief in other priorities and the need to come up with a completely different plan for working with substances. For instance, in places like universities, where everyone speaks so rationally, it is necessary for a kind of enchanter to appear."

Beuys, as he often explained in his interviews, saw and used his performative art as shamanistic and psychoanalytic techniques to both educate and heal the general public.

"It was thus a strategic stage to use the shaman's character but, subsequently, I gave scientific lectures. Also, at times, on one hand, I was a kind of modern scientific analyst, on the other hand, in the actions, I had a synthetic existence as shaman. This strategy aimed at creating in people an agitation for instigating questions rather than for conveying a complete and perfect structure. It was a kind of psychoanalysis with all the problems of energy and culture."^[25]

In that respect his art was educative as well as therapeutic – "his intention was to use these two forms of discourse and styles of knowledge as pedagogues." He used shamanistic and psychoanalytic techniques to "manipulate symbols" and affect his audience.^[26] In his personal life, Beuys had adopted the felt hat, the felt suit, the cane and the vest as his standard look. The imagined story of him being rescued by Tartar herdsmen maybe has an explanation in that Beuys wanted to "create" a ritualistic aspect to his look and to his adoption of materials like felt and fat. Beuys experienced a severe depression between 1955 and 1957. After he recovered, Beuys observed at the time that "his personal crisis" caused him to question everything in life and he called the incident "a shamanistic initiation." Shamanism is related to death and the shaman is the mediator between this world and the "Otherworld". He saw Death not only in the inevitability of death for people but also death in the environment and he became, through his art and his political activism, a strong critic of the environmental destruction. He said at the time,

"I don't use shamanism to refer to death, but vice versa – through shamanism, I refer to the fatal character of the times we live in. But at the same time I also point out that the fatal character of the present can be overcome in the future."

National and international recognition (1975 - 1986)

The only major retrospective of Beuys work to be organised in Beuys's lifetime opened at the Guggenheim Museum in New York in 1979. The exhibition has been described as a "lightning rod for American criticism," eliciting as it did some powerful and polemical responses.^[27]

Death

Beuys died of heart failure on January 23, 1986, in Düsseldorf, after a long illness.^[28]

Body of work



Homogeneous Infiltration for Piano 1966, Georges Pompidou Center, Paris

Beuys' extensive body of work principally comprises four domains: works of art in a traditional sense (painting, drawing, sculpture and installations), performance, contributions to the theory of art and academic teaching, and social- and political activities.

Artworks and performances

In 1962 Beuys befriended his Düsseldorf colleague Nam June Paik, a member of the Fluxus movement. This was the beginning of what was to be a brief formal involvement with Fluxus, a loose

international group of artists who championed a radical erosion of the boundaries of art, bringing aspects of creative practice outside of the institution and into the everyday. Although Beuys participated in a number of Fluxus events, it soon became clear that he viewed the implications of art's economic and institutional framework differently. Indeed, whereas Fluxus was directly inspired by the radical Dada activities emerging during the First World War, Beuys in 1964 broadcast (from Second German Television Studio) a rather different message: 'Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet' ('The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated'). Beuys's relationship with the legacy of Duchamp and the Readymade is a central (if often unacknowledged) aspect of the controversy surrounding his practice.

"How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare" (performance, 1965)

Beuys's first solo exhibition in a private gallery opened on November 26, 1965 with one of the artist's most famous and compelling performances: *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. The artist could be viewed through the glass of the gallery's window. His face was covered in honey and gold leaf, an iron slab was attached to his boot. In his arms he cradled a dead hare, into whose ear he mumbled muffled noises as well as explanations of the drawings that lined the walls. Such materials and actions had specific symbolic value for Beuys. For example, honey is the product of bees, and for Beuys (following Rudolf Steiner), bees represented an ideal society of warmth and brotherhood. Gold had its importance within alchemical enquiry, and iron, the metal of Mars, stood for a masculine principle of strength and connection to the earth. A photograph from the performance, in which



Beuys Felt TV performance by Lothar Wolleh

Beuys is sitting with the hare, has been described "by some critics as a new *Mona Lisa* of the 20th century," though Beuys disagreed with the description.

Beuys explained his performance thus: "In putting honey on my head I am clearly doing something that has to do with thinking. Human ability is not to produce honey, but to think, to produce ideas. In this way the deathlike character of thinking becomes lifelike again. For honey is undoubtedly a living substance. Human thinking can be lively too. But it can also be intellectualized to a deadly degree, and remain dead, and express its deadliness in, say, the political or pedagogic fields. "Gold and honey indicate a transformation of the head, and therefore, naturally and logically, the brain and our understanding of thought, consciousness and all the other levels necessary to explain pictures to a hare: the warm stool insulated with felt...and the iron sole with the magnet. I had to walk on this sole when I carried the hare round from picture to picture, so along with the strange limp came the clank of iron on the hard stone floor—that was all that broke the silence, since my explanations were mute... "This seems to have been the action that most captured people's imaginations. On one level this must be because everyone consciously or unconsciously recognizes the problem of explaining things, particularly where art and creative work are concerned, or anything that involves a certain mystery or question. The idea of explaining to an animal conveys a sense of the secrecy of the world and of existence that appeals to the imagination. Then, as I said, even a dead animal preserves more powers of intuition than some human beings with their stubborn rationality. "The problem lies in the word 'understanding' and its many levels which cannot be restricted to rational analysis. Imagination, inspiration, and longing all lead people to sense that these other levels also play a part in understanding. This must be the root of reactions to this action, and is why my technique has been to try and seek out the energy points in the human power field, rather than demanding specific knowledge or reactions on then part of the public. I try to bring to light the complexity of creative areas."^[29]

Beuys produced many such spectacular, ritualistic performances, and he developed a compelling persona whereby he took on a liminal, shamanistic role, as if to enable passage between different physical and spiritual states. Further examples of such performances include: *EURASIA* (1965), *Celtic (Kinloch Rannoch) Scottish Symphony* (1970),

and I Like America and America Likes Me (1974).

"I Like America and America Likes Me" (performance, 1974)

Art historian Uwe Schneede considers this performance pivotal for the reception of German avantgarde art in the U.S.A., it paved the way for the recognition of Beuys' own work, but also that of contemporaries such as Lüpertz, Baselitz, Kiefer and many others in the 1980s.^[30] In May 1974 Beuys flew to New York and was taken by ambulance to the site of the performance, a room in the René Block Gallery on East Broadway. Beuys lay on the ambulance stretcher swathed in felt. He shared this room with a wild coyote, for eight hours over three days. At times he stood, wrapped in a thick, grey blanket of felt, leaning on a large shepherd's staff. At times he lay on the straw, at times he watched the coyote as the coyote watched him and cautiously circled the man, or shredded the blanket to pieces, and at times he engaged in symbolic gestures, such as striking a large triangle or tossing his leather gloves to the animal; the performance continuously shifted between elements that were required by the realities of the situation, and elements that had purely symbolic character. At the end of the three days, Beuys hugged the coyote that had grown quite tolerant of him, and was taken to the airport. Again he rode in a veiled ambulance, leaving America without having set foot on its ground. As Beuys later explained: 'I wanted to isolate myself, insulate myself, see nothing of America other than the coyote.'^[30]

The concept of "Social Sculpture"

It was during the 1960s that Beuys formulated his central theoretical concepts concerning the social, cultural and political function and potential of art. Indebted to Romantic writers such as Novalis and Schiller, Beuys was motivated by a belief in the power of universal human creativity and was confident in the potential for art to bring about revolutionary change. These ideas were founded in the body of social ideas of Rudolf Steiner known as Social Threefolding, of which he was a vigorous and original proponent. This translated into Beuys's formulation of the concept of social sculpture, in which society as a whole was to be regarded as one great work of art (the Wagnerian Gesamtkunstwerk) to which each person can contribute creatively (perhaps Beuys's most famous phrase, borrowed from Novalis, is 'Everyone is an artist'). In the video "Willoughby SHARP, *Joseph Beuys, Public Dialogues* (1974/120 min)", a record of Beuys's first major public discussion in the U.S., Beuys elaborates three principles: Freedom, Democracy, and Socialism, saying that each of them depends on the other two in order to be meaningful. In 1973, Beuys wrote:

"Only on condition of a radical widening of definitions will it be possible for art and activities related to art [to] provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deadline: to dismantle in order to build 'A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART'... EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who – from his state of freedom – the position of freedom that he experiences at first-hand – learns to determine the other positions of the TOTAL ART WORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER."^[31]



Some of the 7,000 Oaks planted between 1982 and 1987 for Documenta 7 (1982)

In 1982 he was invited to create a work for Documenta 7. He delivered a large pile of basalt stones. From above one could see that the pile of stones was a large arrow pointing to a single oak tree that he had planted. He announced that the stones should not be moved unless an oak tree was planted in the new location of the stone. 7,000 oak trees were then planted in Kassel, Germany.^[32] This project exemplified the idea that a social sculpture was defined as interdisciplinary and participatory. Beuys's wanted to effect environmental and social change through this project. The Dia Art Foundation continues his project still and has planted more trees and paired them with basalt stones too. Beuys said that:

My point with these seven thousand trees was that each would be a monument, consisting of a living part, the live tree, changing all the time, and a crystalline mass, maintaining its shape, size, and weight. This stone can be transformed only by taking from it, when a piece splinters off, say, never by growing. By placing these two objects side by side, the proportionality of the monument's two parts will never be the same.

^[33] In an age of social media and web 2.0 the concept of social sculpture acquires new resonances even Wikipedia may be regarded as a social sculpture in the Beuysian sense. The revolutionary concept, "Everyone is a writer of an encyclopedia" is near what Beuys meant by "Everyone is an artist".

Sonne Statt Reagan

In 1982, Beuys recorded a music video for a song he had written entitled "Sonne statt Reagan ^[34]", which translates to "Sun, not Rain/Reagan" This was an anti-Reagan political piece that included some clever puns in German and continued to reinforce some of the key messages of Beuys' career—namely an extremely liberal, pacifist political attitude; a desire to perpetuate open discourse on art and politics; a refusal to sanctify his own image and 'artistic reputation' by only doing the kinds of work other people expected he would do; and above all an openness to exploring different media forms to get across the messages he wanted to convey. His continued commitment to the demystification and dis-institutionalization of the 'art world' was never more clear than it is here.

Beuys made it clear that he considered this song as a work of art, not the "pop" product it appears to be, which is apparent from the moment one views it. Such becomes more obvious when one looks at the lyrics, which are aimed directly at Reagan, the military complex and whoever is trying to defrost the "Cold War" to make it "hot." The song has to be understood in the context of intense liberal and progressive frustration in 1982. Beuys warns Reagan et al that the peace-loving masses are behind him, and that includes the Americans as well. (<http://www.fluter.de/de/protest/musik/6244/>).

This work has been avoided in some discourse on Beuys because he has been put in artistically sacrosanct position and this is not in conformance with Beuys' other work. In choosing to do a piece in the form of popular music, Beuys demonstrated a commitment to his views and the most expansive ways of having them reach people. While it is easy to resist and ridicule Beuys' efforts in the pop arena, it does not change the fact that this is an important part of his collected works that needs to be acknowledged to better understand his scope, intention and own views of art.

7000 Oaks Project

One of Beuys' more famous and ambitious pieces of social sculpture was the 7000 Oaks project. The project was of enormous scope, and met with some controversy. While the biggest difficulty of the project was raising the money, the project had its share of opponents. Much of it was political, from the conservative state government dominated by the Christian Democrats. (The mayor of Kassel was a social democrat who stood by Beuys). Some people thought the black stone markers were ugly, even piling pink stones on the sites in 1982 as a prank. Also, a motorcyclist had died as a result of one of the stone markers. However, as more trees were planted people's perception of the project as a parking lot destroyer had met with increasing tolerance. (<http://www.7000eichen.de/stiftung/nemeczek.html>)

The display of a tree with a solid stone, at first glance, may be an enigma by itself. It generates questions and full of wonders that consecutively lead to additional questions. What is this eccentric juxtaposition of the gray solid stone with the green-leaf tree trying to represent? As with most of Beuys' art works, the underlying philosophy embedded in the 7000 Oaks project is to encourage the challenge towards the established assumptions. It should be noted however, that it is not merely a denial against the conventional perceptions, but rather a desire for a new attitude. The solid stone that stands beside the ever-changing tree is a symbolic representation that brings out this message. These two natural and yet oppositional qualities are complementary and coexisting harmoniously. As a symbol of regeneration, a slow progressive growing oak tree represents a continuous transformation of life, society and the entire ecological system.

"I think the tree is an element of regeneration which in itself is a concept of time. The oak is especially so because it is a slowly growing tree with a kind of really solid heart wood. It has always been a form of sculpture, a symbol for this planet ever since the Druids, who are called after the oak. Druid means oak. They used their oaks to define their holy places. I can see such a use for the future.... The tree planting enterprise provides a very simple but radical possibility for this when we start with the seven thousand oaks." (Joseph Beuys in conversation with Richard Demarco, 1982)

"The planting of seven thousand oak trees is only a symbolic beginning. Contrary to its initiative, progressive features such a symbolic beginning requires a marker, in this instance a basalt column. Future goals for the project included: a) an ongoing scheme of tree planting to be extended throughout the world as part of a global mission to effect environmental & social change "the purpose of educational activities"; b) a growth of awareness within the urban environment of the human dependence on the larger ecosystem educational outreach ; and c) an ongoing process whereby the society would be activated by means of human creative will social sculpture."

Beuys' art works and performances are not about entertaining and amusing the audience. It is an awakening message from the tradition, a recognition of the whole based upon a new concept of beauty that extends beyond the instant gratification.

"I not only want to stimulate people, I want to provoke them." (Bastian, Heines and Jeannot Simmen, "Interview with Joseph Beuys," in the catalog exhibition, Joseph Beuys, Drawings, Victoria and Albert Museum, Westminster Press, 1983, no folio)

It is a movement from the tradition, the expected, and the established for an inclusive openness.

For more information on the 7000 Oaks project, please see the article.

Legacy

Beuys' 7000 Oaks work is an example of the thread that links the Situationist International's approach to art and its re-creation by new groups continues to evolve through a new generation of socially conscious organizations that merge art, education, and environmental issues in their work. In 2000, the Center for Art Design and Visual Culture (out of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County) developed the Joseph Beuys Tree Partnership and planted over 350 trees in various parks in Baltimore Parks with the help of over 500 volunteers including children from local schools.^[35] The project was organized around Beuys' philosophy that 'everyone can be an artist' by acknowledging the creativity inherent in volunteers planting trees on their own. The goal of the project was also to "extend the traditional role of the art gallery so the gallery extends out into the city".^[36]

Political activities

Amongst other things, Beuys founded (or co-founded) the following political organisations: German Student Party (1967), Organization for Direct Democracy Through Referendum (1971), Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research (1974), and German Green Party Die Grünen (1980). Beuys became a pacifist, was a vocal opponent of nuclear weapons and campaigned strenuously for environmental causes (indeed, he was elected a Green Party candidate for the European Parliament). Some of Beuys's art dealt explicitly with the

issues at play in the political groups with which he was affiliated. His song and music video "Sun Instead of Reagan!" (1982) manifests the theme of regeneration (optimism, growth, hope) that runs through his life and work as well as his interest in contemporary nuclear politics: "But we want: sun instead of Reagan, to live without weapons! Whether West, whether East, let missiles rust!"^[37]

Critiques

One thing that the Guggenheim retrospective and its catalogue did was to afford an American critical audience a comprehensive view of Beuys's practice and rhetoric. Whereas Beuys had been a central figure in the post-war European artistic consciousness for some time, American audiences had previously only had partial and fleeting access to his work. In 1980, and building on the scepticism voiced by Belgian artist Marcel Broodthaers, who in 1972 *Open Letter* had compared Beuys to Wagner,^[38] art historian Benjamin Buchloh (who was teaching at Staatliche Kunstakademie, just like Beuys) launched a polemically forceful attack on Beuys.^[39] The essay was (and remains) the most vitriolic and thoroughgoing critique of both Beuys's rhetoric (referred to as "simple-minded utopian drive") and persona (Buchloh regards Beuys as both infantile and messianic).^[40]

Firstly, Buchloh draws attention to Beuys's fictionalisation of his own biography,^[41] which he sees as symptomatic of a dangerous cultural tendency of disavowing a traumatic past and retreating into the realms of myth and esoteric symbolism. Buchloh attacks Beuys for his failure to acknowledge and engage with Nazism, the Holocaust, and their implications. Secondly, Buchloh criticizes Beuys for displaying an inability or reluctance to engage with the consequences of the work of Marcel Duchamp. That is, a failure to acknowledge the framing function of the art institution and the inevitable dependence upon such institutions to create meaning for art objects. If Beuys championed art's power to foster political transformation, he nevertheless failed to acknowledge the limits imposed upon such aspirations by the art museum and dealership networks that served somewhat less utopian ambitions. For Buchloh, rather than acknowledging the collective and contextual formation of meaning, Beuys instead attempted to prescribe and control the meanings of his art, and often in the form of dubious esoteric or symbolic codings. Buchloh's critique has been developed by a number of commentators such as Stefan Germer and Rosalind Krauss.^[42]

Recuperations

Buchloh's critique has been subject to revision. His attention is given to dismantling a mythologized artistic persona and utopian rhetoric, which he regarded to be irresponsible and even (it is implied) proto-fascist. Since Buchloh's essay was written, however, a great deal of new archival material has come to light. Most significantly, Beuys's proposal for an Auschwitz-Birkenau memorial, submitted in 1958. It has been claimed that the existence of such a project invalidates Buchloh's claim that Beuys retreated from engaging with the Nazi legacy, a point that Buchloh himself has recently acknowledged, although the charges of romanticism and self-mythologizing remain.^[43]

Beuys's charisma and eclecticism have polarised his audience. Beuys has attracted a huge number of admirers and devotees, the tendency of whom has been to uncritically accept Beuys's own explanations as interpretive solutions to his work. In contrast, there are those who, following Buchloh, are relentlessly critical of Beuys's rhetoric and use weaknesses in his argumentation to dismiss his work as bogus. Relatively few accounts have been concerned with an encounter with the works themselves, with exceptions arriving in the scholarship of art historians such as Gene Ray, Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Briony Fer, Andy Wear, Alex Potts, and others. The drive here has been to wrest the potential of Beuys's work away from the artist's own rhetoric, and to further explore both the wider discursive formations within which Beuys operated (this time, productively), and the specific material properties of the works themselves.^[44]

Examples of contemporary artists who have drawn from the legacy of Beuys include AA Bronson, former member of the artists' collaborative *General Idea*, who, not without irony, adopts the subject position of the shaman to reclaim art's restorative, healing powers; Andy Wear (artist) whose installations are deliberately formed according to the Beuysian notion of 'stations' and are (in particular, referencing the *Block Beuys* in Darmstadt) essentially a

constellation of works performed or created externally to the installation; and Peter Gallo, whose drawing cycle "I wish I could draw like Joseph Beuys" features stretches of Beuys's writings combined with images traced from vintage gay pornography onto found pieces of paper.

Exhibitions

Franz Joseph and Hans van der Grinten organized Beuys' first solo show at their house in Kranenburg in 1953. The Alfred Schmela Galerie was the first commercial gallery to hold a Beuys solo exhibition in 1965. Beuys participated for the first time in Documenta in Kassel in 1964. In 1969, he was included in Harald Szeemann's groundbreaking exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* at the Kunsthalle Basel.

The 1970s were marked by numerous major exhibitions throughout Europe and the United States. In 1970 a large collection of Beuys' work formed under the artist's own aegis, the Ströher Collection, was installed in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt, which remains the most important public collection of his work. Pontus Hultén invited him to exhibit at Moderna Museet in 1971. Beuys represented Germany at the Venice Biennale in 1976 and 1980. A retrospective of his work was held at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1979. In 1984, Beuys visited Japan and showed various works, including installations and performances, while also holding discussions with students and giving lectures. His first Beuys exhibition took place at the Seibu Museum in Tokyo that same year. The Dia Art Foundation held exhibitions of Beuys's work in 1987, 1992, and 1998, and has planted trees and basalt columns in New York City as part of his 7000 Eichen, a project he began in 1982 for Documenta 7 in Kassel, Germany.^[45]

Selected exhibitions

- 1964 documenta, Kassel, Germany
- 1972 documenta, Kassel, Germany
- 1976 Venice Biennale, Italy
- 1979 Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, U.S.
- 1980 Rocca Paolina, Perugia, Italy
- 1984 Seibu-Museum, Tokyo, Japan
- 2005 Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom 'Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments' [46]
- 2006 Museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf; Kunstmuseum Bonn; Museum Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin
- 2006 The David Winton Bell Gallery, Brown University, Providence, U.S. Another View of Joseph Beuys^[47]
- 2007 Zwirner & Wirth, New York City, U.S. zwirnerandwirth.com^[48]
- 2007 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia - Imagination, Inspiration, Intuition (Joseph Beuys & Rudolf Steiner)^[49]
- 2008/2009 Hamburger Bahnhof – Museum für Gegenwart, Berlin, Germany - Beuys. We are the Revolution, Video at VernissageTV^[50]
- 2009 Museum of Modern Art - Focus on Joseph Beuys on Artabase^[51]
- 2009 Beuys is Here, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill on Sea, East Sussex [52]
- 2010 Joseph Beuys - A Revolução Somos Nós ("Joseph Beuys - We are the revolution"), Sesc Pompéia, São Paulo, Brasil [53]

Art market

The first works Franz Joseph and Hans van der Grinten bought from Joseph Beuys in 1951 cost what would be equivalent today to €10 each. Beginning with small woodcuts, they purchased about 4,000 works and created what is now the largest Beuys collection in the world.^[54] In 1967, the 'Beuys Block', a group of first works, was purchased by the collector Karl Ströher in Darmstadt (now part of the Hessisches Landesmuseum).

Until today, Beuys' artworks are regarded as being hard to price and not always easy to sell. At auction, the top price for a Beuys work was for a bronze sculpture titled *Corsett* that fetched \$1.05 million at Sotheby's New York in 2008. His priciest sled took in \$156,000 at Phillips de Pury, New York, in 2007. The most expensive felt suit sold for 62,000 euros at Lempertz, a German auction house, which was \$91,381.80 at the exchange rate of the sale date, Nov. 29, 2007.^[55] In 2006, the Broad Art Foundation in Los Angeles acquired 570 multiples by Joseph Beuys,^[56] thereby becoming the most important collection of Beuys multiples in the western United States and one of the three largest in the world.

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- [4] See Claudia Schmuckli: 'Chronology and Selected Exhibition History,' in Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments (Tate, 2005).
- [5] Lothar Schirmer (Hrsg.): *Mein Dank an Lehmbruck. Eine Rede*. Schirmer/Mosel, München 2006, S. 44
- [6] Ermen 2007, p. 11
- [7] The implications are ambiguous, Germany was at war since September 1939, military service was mandatory, and volunteering was one way to influence deployment.
- [8] Beuys in Caroline Tisdall: Joseph Beuys (Guggenheim, 1979), p.16-7.
- [9] cf Jörg Herold, 2000 (<http://www.eigen-art.com/Kuenstlerseiten/KuenstlerseiteJH/mappe.pdf>), (pdf, english); Guth, Peter: Ein Tag im Leben des Joseph B., Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, 07.08.2000, p. 43
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- [11] For a detailed account of the complex emergence of this powerful story, see Peter Nisbet: 'Crash Course – Remarks on a Beuys Story,' in Gene Ray (ed.): Joseph Beuys, Mapping the Legacy (D.A.P., 2001).
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External links

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- FIU-Verlag: The editor of the Free International University (FIU) and events (<http://www.fiu-verlag.com/>)
- The Beuys Homepage by "Free International University"(FIU) (<http://www.beuys.org/>)
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- Picture gallery (<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/core/Slideshow/slideshowContentFrameFrag.jhtml?xml=/arts/2005/01/31/beuys/beuys.xml>)

- The Social Sculpture Research Unit (<http://www.social-sculpture.org/>)
- The Urban Forest Project (Our Tree) (<http://design.walkerart.org/tree/>)
- (<http://www.tate.org.uk/valueart/value/working/artworks/beuys.htm>) introductory worksheets for use with kids and groups based on the works at Tate Modern
- Joseph Beuys Every man is an artist; Documenta Kassel (in Spanish) (http://www.margencero.com/articulos/new/joseph_beuys.html)
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