



Berlin, 9 April 2024

Hamburger Bahnhof – Nationalgalerie der Gegenwart  
**Joseph Beuys. Collection Presentation**  
From 22 March 2024

## EXHIBITION TEXTS

### Joseph Beuys

#### **Works from the Nationalgalerie Collection**

Joseph Beuys was a draftsman, sculptor, action and installation artist, teacher, politician and activist. Born in Krefeld in 1921, he grew up in Kleve. He died in Düsseldorf in 1986.

Having grown up under National Socialism in Germany, and actively participated in the Hitler Youth and the armed forces, Beuys sought to transform the totalitarian society of his youth into one of warmth and radical democracy: by means of art, and in conversation and cooperation with all people.

Beuys called the collective transformation of society he envisaged “social sculpture.” By that, he meant an expanded form of art, in which all human beings – as the artists they innately are – could and should participate. Beuys took his own personal transformation as his point of departure. The extent to which he actually achieved the inner change he was striving for is still highly contested today.

The collection presentation explores the ways in which Beuys explored the boundaries and responsibilities of art through his work. It also offers an insight into the mixed public response to the artist through books and audio contributions, while juxtaposing his vision of social renewal with the ideas of other people, such as the civil rights activist Angela Davis, the writer Ursula K. Le Guin, and the rapper and poet Kae Tempest.

The exhibition celebrates the generous donation of works to the Nationalgalerie made by the family of collector Erich Marx.

#### **Joseph Beuys, Straßenbahnhaltestelle / Tram Stop / Fermata del Tram. A monument to the future, 2. Fassung, 1976**

Joseph Beuys conceived this sculpture as a monument to the future. It embodies his efforts to transform relics of violence into symbols of peace. The artist modeled his work on a peace memorial constructed from decommissioned weapons in his hometown, Kleve. Beuys is said to have often waited at the tram stop located next to the memorial as a child. He began by producing iron casts of the surviving elements of the sculpture: the barrel of a cannon and four mortars. To these he added a tram switch, several iron rods, an iron crank and a sculpture of a head. Protruding from the opening of the cannon, the head depicts an important role model for the artist: Anacharsis Cloots. This self-proclaimed “orator of the human race” also came from Kleve. He campaigned during the French Revolution for the unification of all people within a community based on universal human rights.

5 parts made of cast iron: column, 4 cylinders; tram track (switch), 22 iron rods, iron crank handle  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Marx Collection (Property of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz)

GENERALDIREKTION  
PRESS – COMMUNICATION – SPONSORS

Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

**MECHTILD KRONENBERG**  
HEAD OF DIVISION

**FIONA GEUSS**  
PRESS OFFICER NATIONALGALERIE

Tel: +49 30 3978 34-16  
Mobile: +49 151 527 51 565

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse



### **Werner Nekes und Dore O., Beuys, 1981**

Joseph Beuys sought to renew society through the creative possibilities of art. In the short film shown here, the artist outlines how such a renewal might be achieved. Wearing his characteristic overcoat and hat, he also explains the materials on which his artistic practice was based: felt, fat, and copper. Within his cosmos, they symbolize energy, warmth, and movement. Portraying himself as a lone warrior, the artist appears to be weary. By the time the film was shot, he had spent more than twenty years trying to convince people of his ideas – with limited success. Was he turning his back on the people as he does in the film? Or did he want them to identify with him? The film leaves these questions unresolved.

16-mm film, digitised, color, sound, 11 Min.  
© The Estate of Werner Nekes and The Estate of Dore O.

### **Joseph Beuys, Aktionen, 1964–1982**

By the early 1960s, Joseph Beuys was convinced that everyone could actively contribute to the democratization of society – as the artists he believed all human beings to be. The question was: how? Beuys developed possible answers to this question in so-called Actions like the ones presented here in documentary form. From 1963 onwards, he staged over thirty such performative works. Here he adopted many different roles, such as a shaman, teacher, gangster or gardener. This gesture is sometimes interpreted as an act of appropriation, a form of arrogance. Beuys saw his Actions as exercises, as an experimental form of thinking and learning. At the same time, he used them to demonstrate his ideas. He later incorporated the objects used in the actions into his sculptural and installation works.

1 Transsibirische Bahn (Trans-Siberian Railway), 1970  
An Action for a film shot by Ole John in February 1970 on the occasion of the exhibition *TABERNAKEL* at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk near Copenhagen  
16 mm film, digitized, black-and-white, sound, 19 min.  
© Joseph Beuys Estate and VG Bild-Kunst Bonn 2024

2 I like America and America likes Me, 1974  
An Action from May 23 to 25, 1974, each day from 10:00 a. m. to 6:00 p. m., at the René Block Gallery in New York with a film documentation by Helmut Wietz (camera), René Block Gallery Ltd. New York in collaboration with Joseph Beuys (production)  
16 mm film, digitized, black-and-white, sound, 37:28 min.  
Archiv Galerie Block Berlin, © Joseph Beuys Estate and VG Bild-Kunst Bonn 2024

3 wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt (how to explain pictures to a dead hare), 1965  
An Action on the occasion of the opening of the Beuys exhibition ... *irgendein Strang (any one strand)* ... on November 26, 1965 at 8:00 p. m. at Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf  
16 mm film, digitized, black-and-white, no sound, 6:22 min.  
© Joseph Beuys Estate and VG Bild-Kunst Bonn 2024

GENERALDIREKTION  
PRESS – COMMUNICATION – SPONSORS

Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

**MECHTILD KRONENBERG**  
HEAD OF DIVISION

**FIONA GEUSS**  
PRESS OFFICER NATIONALGALERIE

Tel: +49 30 3978 34-16  
Mobile: +49 151 527 51 565

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse



GENERALDIREKTION  
PRESS – COMMUNICATION – SPONSORS

Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

**MECHTILD KRONENBERG**  
HEAD OF DIVISION

**FIONA GEUSS**  
PRESS OFFICER NATIONALGALERIE

Tel: +49 30 3978 34-16  
Mobile: +49 151 527 51 565

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse

4 Handaktion (Hand Action), 1968  
An action at Cheamcheese, Düsseldorf on December 5, 1968 as part of the action *Der Tisch (The Table)* by Anatol Herzfeld with Joachim Duckwitz, Ulrich Meister and Johannes Stüttgen  
16 mm and Super 8 film, digitized, black-and-white, sound, 4:26 min.  
© Estate of Dietmar Kirves; Joseph Beuys Estate and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024

5 Honigpumpe am Arbeitsplatz (Honey Pump at the Workplace), 1977  
The Honey Pump formed the center of the *Free International University (F. I. U.)*, which was hosted by the Museum Fridericianum in Kassel during the 100 days of documenta 6 (1977).  
From: Werner Krüger, Joseph Beuys – *Jeder Mensch ist ein Künstler (Everyone Is an Artist)*, 1979/80, color, sound, 56 min., excerpt: 4:47 min.  
© Werner Krüger; © Joseph Beuys Estate and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024

6 7000 Eichen – Stadtverwaltung statt Stadtverwaltung (7000 Oaks – City Forestation instead of City Administration), 1982–1987  
An Action begun at documenta 7(1982) and concluded with the planting of the 7,000th oak tree by the artist's son Wenzel Beuys at documenta 8 (1987)  
From: *Aspekte Extra. Museum der 100 Tage. Bericht von der documenta 7*, 1982  
Video, digitized, 4:3, color, sound, 58:34 min., excerpt: 9:24 min.  
© ZDF; © Joseph Beuys Estate and VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2024

### **Joseph Beuys, 4 Bücher aus: „Projekt Westmensch“ 1958, 1958–1965**

Joseph Beuys regarded these four notebooks as his first manifesto. Here, over many pages and several years, he developed the main tenets of his theory of social sculpture. The theory contends that everything is sculpture – and that everyone is an artist. By means of their innate creativity, so the idea goes, all human beings shape their identity and life, their environment and society. Beuys's key formula – sculpture = everything – can be found among the many drawings, lists of materials, notes, short sentences, and formulae that fill the notebooks. The books are not a completed work, but rather the beginning of *Projekt Westmensch (Energy Plan for the Western Man)*: Beuys's long-term research project on social transformation. Its main aim was to overcome the divide between Eastern and Western traditions of thought: between intuition and reason.

Facsimile edition; Edition Schellmann, Cologne, 1992  
Private Collection

**Joseph Beuys, DAS ENDE DES 20. JAHRHUNDERTS, 1982–1983**  
*THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY* emerged out of Beuys's *7000 Oaks* project for documenta 7 (1982) in Kassel. With this large-scale, ecological sculpture, whose realization involved thousands of people, Beuys moved beyond the conventional realm of art. 7000 oak trees were planted in and around Kassel, each next to an upright basalt stele. The work shown here incorporates the same kind of basalt steles. Yet from each of these stones, Beuys carved out a cone, wrapped it in felt, and placed it back

Taking photographs is solely permitted for the current press coverage of the exhibition/event. For any further use of photos you are required to clarify issues of copyright and usage rights independently in advance. You are responsible for obtaining further rights (e.g. copyrights for works of art portrayed, personal rights etc.).



inside the same cavity from which he had taken it. He laid each of the cones on a bed of clay to ensure it would not be hurt and would stay warm. With this caring intervention, the artist sought to initiate an early beginning to the new century. He arranged twenty-one of these stones on wooden pallets, blocks of planed square-edge timber and a pallet jack combined with a crowbar. This created a work-like environment, calling on people to work together on both history and the future.

21 basalt stelae on square-edge timber and wooden pallets, felt, clay, pallet jack, crowbar  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Sammlung Marx, acquired in 1995 by the State of Berlin

### **Joseph Beuys, Filzanzug, 1970**

This loose-fitting suit consists of a jacket and trousers made of coarse gray felt, a material that Joseph Beuys valued for its warming, insulating properties. Together with fat and copper, felt is one of the materials the artist used most frequently. On the one hand, Beuys saw the suit as a protective “house” or “cave” to insulate people, and on the other, as a symbol of the isolation of modern humanity. This piece belongs to an edition of 100 identical suits. Each of the felt suits was made according to the pattern of a suit worn by Beuys himself. They attest to his tendency to situate himself at the center of his artistic-political movement. This made it difficult for the movement to function in his absence and led to its gradual dissolution after his death in 1986.

Felt, sewn; stamped  
Edition: 100 + 10 h. c., numbered, unsigned  
Edition René Block, Berlin, WV Schellmann no. 26  
Private Collection

### **Andy Warhol, Joseph Beuys, 1980**

From the early 1960s onwards, Andy Warhol created colorful silk-screen portraits of famous personalities, among them Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, Elizabeth Taylor – and Joseph Beuys. The oversized portrait shown here casts him as an icon of popular culture. It is coated with a thin layer of glittery dust. The painting was produced after Beuys had spent time in New York for his first major international exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in 1979. The two artists, both of whom cultivated a mythical public persona, had met for the first time only a few months earlier at an exhibition opening in Düsseldorf. Beuys presumably attached great importance to the advertising potential of Warhol’s portrait. In 1981, he claimed that his entire life was ultimately advertising: for the renewal of society through creativity.

Acrylic, silkscreen ink, and glass dust on canvas  
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Marx Collection

### **Joseph Beuys, Energiestab, 1974**

From electromagnetism to quantum physics, Joseph Beuys exhaustively explored the properties and possibilities of energy. Both energy-generating and energy-conducting processes played a central role from early on in the development of his theory of social sculpture, which he often referred to as his “energy plan.” Indeed, his work contains countless references to electricity and gravity, friction and decay, the sun, thunder-

Taking photographs is solely permitted for the current press coverage of the exhibition/event. For any further use of photos you are required to clarify issues of copyright and usage rights independently in advance. You are responsible for obtaining further rights (e.g. copyrights for works of art portrayed, personal rights etc.).

GENERALDIREKTION  
PRESS – COMMUNICATION – SPONSORS

Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

**MECHTILD KRONENBERG**  
HEAD OF DIVISION

**FIONA GEUSS**  
PRESS OFFICER NATIONALGALERIE

Tel: +49 30 3978 34-16  
Mobile: +49 151 527 51 565

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse



storms, fire – and even love. Yet it also features many different kinds of apparatuses to store energy. Energy staffs like the one displayed here occur across all media in Beuys's practice. They appear in various orientations and forms: vertical or horizontal, curved or straight, wrapped in felt or bare. Beuys used them as instruments to overcome polarities such as East and West, spirit and matter, or chaos and order.

Copper, felt

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Marx Collection (Property of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz)

### **Joseph Beuys, Capri-Batterie, 1985**

Several works by Joseph Beuys, such as the *Capri Battery*, are related to the concept of a "solar state," or "city of the sun". Beuys came across it in *Civitas Solis* (1623): a utopian work by political philosopher Tommaso Campanella. Like Campanella, Beuys placed the power and warmth of the sun at the center of his social utopia. Named after the island of Capri where it was conceived, Beuys's tiny work resembles a miniature model of the sun. It combines a light bulb representing the light of the sun with a lemon symbolizing the energy of the sun. The result is a fruit battery – not unlike the ones you might have made in physics class at school. With this simple gesture, Beuys transformed Campanella's rigid social model into a continuously changing one. The *Capri Battery* is among the artist's final works. It can be thought of as his intellectual and political testament.

Light bulb with plug, lemon

Edition: 200 + a few a. p.

Edizioni Lucio Amelio, Naples, WV Schellmann no. 546

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, 2009 purchased by the Stiftung des Vereins der Freunde der Nationalgalerie für zeitgenössische Kunst

### **Joseph Beuys, DAS KAPITAL RAUM 1970–1977, 1980**

In the course of the 1970s Joseph Beuys realized that there could be no transformation of society without a fundamental rethinking of capital and economics. The installation displayed here explicitly refers to *Das Kapital*, Karl Marx's critique of political economy. In contrast to Marx, Beuys equated capital with human creativity. This large-scale enigmatic work resembles an abandoned stage. It brings together objects and devices drawn from actions and projects largely carried out between 1970 and 1977, such as a concert grand piano and axe, film projectors and a screen, a microphone, tape recorders and loudspeakers. The blackboards with chalk drawings were produced in conjunction with teaching and learning situations that Beuys presented as artworks at two major exhibitions: the *Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendum* at documenta 5 (1972) and the *Free International University* at documenta 6 (1977). In each instance the artist and the public spent 100 days discussing politics, society, and the economy.

Blackboards with chalk, zinc tub with water, soap, towels, gelatine, electronic players and cables, wooden slats, spear, axe, knife, pebbles, grand piano, torches, projection screen

Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Nationalgalerie, Marx Collection (Property of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz)

Taking photographs is solely permitted for the current press coverage of the exhibition/event. For any further use of photos you are required to clarify issues of copyright and usage rights independently in advance. You are responsible for obtaining further rights (e.g. copyrights for works of art portrayed, personal rights etc.).

GENERALDIREKTION  
PRESS – COMMUNICATION – SPONSORS

Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

**MECHTILD KRONENBERG**  
HEAD OF DIVISION

**FIONA GEUSS**  
PRESS OFFICER NATIONALGALERIE

Tel: +49 30 3978 34-16  
Mobile: +49 151 527 51 565

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse



### **Study Island**

This study island comprises two sections: *Talking about Beuys* and *Talking about Transformation*.

*Talking about Beuys* offers an insight into the complex responses the artist has elicited. Here you can form your own opinion about the artist, his work and his legacy by listening to some of the 100 voices on the audio station, or leafing through selected books.

*Talking about Transformation* also assembles audio contributions and books. Here you have the opportunity to compare Beuys's vision of a slow social revolution with proposals for change put forward by other artists, philosophers, writers, and activists.

A selection of new voices will be added to the island every three months. Please let us know who else you would like to hear speak on the topic of transformation. You will find a notebook in the bookshelf where you can share your suggestions.

GENERALDIREKTION  
PRESS – COMMUNICATION – SPONSORS

Stauffenbergstraße 41  
10785 Berlin

**MECHTILD KRONENBERG**  
HEAD OF DIVISION

**FIONA GEUSS**  
PRESS OFFICER NATIONALGALERIE

Tel: +49 30 3978 34-16  
Mobile: +49 151 527 51 565

presse@smb.spk-berlin.de  
www.smb.museum/presse