

Everyone Is an Artist. Cosmopolitical Exercises with Joseph Beuys

As a draftsman, sculptor, teacher, politician, and activist, as well as action and installation artist, Joseph Beuys (1921 Krefeld – Düsseldorf 1986) fundamentally changed the art of the twentieth century. His influence can still be felt today in artistic and political discourses. His centennial in 2021 is an occasion to rediscover, appreciate, and critically question both his complex work and his international appeal. The exhibition in K20 – Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen provides profound insight into the cosmopolitical thinking of Joseph Beuys as manifested in his actions. For here—as an acting, speaking, and animated figure—Beuys examined the central and radical idea of his expanded concept of art: “Everyone is an artist.” The goal of his universalist approach was to renew society from the ground up.

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More than any other artist of his time, Joseph Beuys connected art with social processes, presenting it within a universal claim to politics, science, philosophy, and economics as a creative, transformative force. Divided into twelve chapters, the exhibition in the Klee Hall of K20 provides profound insight into the cosmopolitical thinking of Joseph Beuys as manifested in his actions. These are for the first time the focus of an exhibition, where they visualize the performative potentials of his art, his actionist activities, his quasi-ritual mode of performing, and his transformative treatment of objects and materials. As an acting, speaking, and animated figure, Beuys examined here the central and radical idea of his expanded concept of art: “Everyone is an artist.”

From this, Beuys developed his revolutionary theory of Social Sculpture, which is based on a process of self-transformation. Every individual must see him or herself as an artist and shape his or her life according to the principles of sculpture in order to renew society from the ground up. The creative abilities and the unconditional freedom of the human being inherent in thinking are at the center of his expanded concept of art.

In the exhibition, contemporary artists, as well as representatives from the most diverse sectors of society, partake in a multi-dimensional, transcultural dialogue with Beuys. In each case, a particular action by the artist forms the starting point. In this way, not only can the central questions, themes, and action potentials of his utopia of a Social Sculpture, located in the here and now, be revealed, but his theses on the possibilities of a future conceived from art can be further thought through in the multi-layered dialogues with the selected contemporary positions.

With regard to the discourses on the potential of cosmopolitical thinking that are being conducted worldwide with palpable urgency, Beuys’s search for possibilities of interpersonal solidarity that encompasses all living beings seems more topical than ever. The questions

he formulated, the task he set, and a large number of the categories into which he divided these are echoed in all areas of contemporary crisis thinking, whether in art, philosophy, politics, economics, science, or ecological endeavors. The exhibition aims to make this visible by way of example.

The exhibition architecture developed by raumlaborberlin for the Klee Hall of K20 places the actions of Joseph Beuys at the center of its presentation. These are presented in the form of video projections and photographs, each prominently and separately on a wall surface. The actions enter into a fruitful dialogue, an intellectual exchange that heeds Beuys's demand for a "permanent conference." This discursive confrontation unfolds in a largely open exhibition layout structured by individual spatial niches, which allows numerous visual axes: both between the multi-layered actions of Joseph Beuys themselves and between these and the contemporary voices. In the sense of equal access, visitors are invited here to explore the transformative power of art as actively perceiving, thinking, speaking, feeling, and acting protagonists.

An exhibition in conjunction with *beuys 2021. 100 years of joseph beuys*. A project of the Ministry of Culture and Science of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia in cooperation with the Heinrich-Heine-University, Düsseldorf as main organizer. The Beuys centennial year stands under the patronage of NRW Minister-President Armin Laschet.

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Curators: Isabelle Malz (Curator, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen), together with Catherine Nichols and Eugen Blume (Guest Curators)

Positions in the exhibition:

Joseph Beuys, B-Town Warriors, Phyllida Barlow, Nelly Ben Hayoun-Stépanian, Fatou Bensouda, Huma Bhabha, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Angela Davis, Dusadee Huntrakul, Charles Foster, Núria Güell, Donna Haraway, Raphael Hillebrand, Jenny Holzer, Michel Houellebecq, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Zoe Leonard, Goshka Macuga, Milk Tea Alliance, Lutz Mommartz, Tuan Andrew Nguyen, William Pope.L., Tejal Shah, Vandana Shiva, Santiago Sierra, Patti Smith, Edward Snowden, Christopher D. Stone, Suzanne Lacy, The Otolith Group, Thich Nhat Hanh, Greta Thunberg, and Malala Yousafzai.

Publication:

The exhibition is accompanied by a discursive, German-English catalogue-book rich in material published by the internationally renowned Hatje Cantz Verlag. It deepens the dialogue with Beuys about art as a prerequisite for a transformation of society that is necessary for survival on all levels, as renowned authors from the most diverse disciplines get to the bottom of the proposition, the thought, the postulate that everyone, truly everyone, is an artist.

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K20, March 27 – August 15, 2021

Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf

Press Conference: March 25, 2021, 11:00 am at K20

Media Partner of the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen:

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung

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of North Rhine-Westphalia

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