

# JOSEPH BEUYS (1921–1986)

## THE MAN AND HIS MULTIPLES

- 15.** Beuys, Joseph. *Ja Ja Ja Nee Nee Nee*. Vinyl record (33 RPM) inside card sleeve with 12-page booklet. Milan: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, 1970. AM 5239

*This record consists of Beuys repeating the German words for “yes” and “no” with different inflections and rhythms for the entire recording. He first performed this work at the Staatliche Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf in 1968. The Ja and Ne might be seen as corresponding to positive and negative spaces in sculpture. The symmetrical, oft-repeated text gives the listener the impression of hearing a one-sided phone conversation. By shaping sound with a human voice over a fixed time period, the work may be seen as blurring the rigid distinction between sculpture and music.*

- 16.** Beuys, Joseph. *Sonne statt Reagan*. Vinyl record (45 RPM) inside card sleeve (two-colour print on sleeve). Cologne: EMI Electrola (Musilkant), 1982. AM 7419

*Beuys used a variety of media, including popular music, to disseminate his ideas. Here, he recorded as lead singer with the pop ensemble Die Deserteure. He also performed the work live at peace rallies. The stencil-style graphics on the jacket echo the type of lettering often used on protest posters.*

*The song title refers to the German word for “rain” (regan), a homonym for the U.S. President at the time. The last refrain reads:*

*“We really want sun instead of Reagan, to live without weapons!*

*Whether West, whether East, let missiles rust!*

*Yeah we want: sun instead of Reagan, to live without armaments!*

*Whether West, whether East, a plague on all Cold Warriors!”*

- 17.** Stüttgen, Johannes, comp. *Joseph Beuys 7000 Eichen (7,000 Oaks)*. Brochure. Free International University: May 1982. AM 1441

*Beuys and Heinrich Böll wrote the 1973 Manifesto on the Foundation of a “Free International School for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research.” The FIU existed until 1988. Branches were established in cities around the world to promote research and exchanges. Between 1982 and 1987, the Tree Office Kassel FIU realized Beuys’ immense, living social sculpture of regeneration, urban renewal and environmental art. The project entailed planting 7,000 oak trees paired with columnar basalt boulders. The last tree was planted by Beuys’ son Wenzel the year after the artist’s death at the opening of Documenta VII. Today, the mature trees and rocks have transformed Kassel. As Beuys had hoped, the concept has been copied elsewhere, including in New York City by the Dia Foundation.*

- 18.** Bastian, Heiner. *Abschied Von Joseph Beuys*. Cologne: Verlag Der Buchhandlung and Walther König, 1986. AM 1451

*This limited edition book by Beuys’ friend honours the artist who died of heart failure following a long illness on 23 January 1986. The German word abschied has a variety of possible English meanings: farewell, parting, send-off, valediction, goodbye, leave-taking. The marbled cover design with emerald green highlights repeats the colour of Beuys’ violin multiple, now on display in gallery B206.*

- 19.** *Ohne die Rose tun wir’s nicht Für Joseph Beuys*. Heidelberg: Edition Staeck, 1986. AM 1439

*Created in honour of Beuys, this publication contains works by close to 200 artists. It was originally intended for the artist’s sixty-fifth birthday, which he did not live to see. The title means “We’re not doing it without the rose” and refers to the 1972 edition of Documenta V in Kassel, Germany, where Beuys sat at a table with a single rose for a hundred days discussing non-stop with visitors his ideas for change. Keith Haring’s playful contribution evokes Beuys’ affinity with the hare while paying tribute to the artist’s 1965 performance. (See item 2.)*

- 20.** Kennedy, Garry Neill. *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968–78*. Halifax: Art Gallery of Nova Scotia, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012, p.p. 334–35.

*This photo shows Beuys during his second visit to Canada in 1976. The sale of his blackboard drawing to the Art Gallery of Ontario in 1991 allowed for the establishment of a scholarship in the artist’s honour.*

This exhibition, held in conjunction with the show of sculptures by Joseph Beuys (01 December 2015 – 27 November 2017), features a selection of the artist’s multiples, including photographs, tracts, postcards and records. Other objects, images and texts illustrate his concept of social sculpture, his political activism and performances, as well as his expansion of sculptural vocabulary with materials such as felt and honey.

As the exhibition title suggests, Beuys’ life and art were indistinguishable, forming a whole. Photographs of his performances convey a sense of his charismatic persona. While Beuys’ work resonates in a particular way with Germans, his themes of suffering, empathy and atonement evoke universal responses. His postwar career helped re-establish an avant-garde tradition in Germany; his grimy, unfixed, scarred aesthetics were completely at odds with the officially promoted art of the Nazi era.

Connected to his cultural theories, Beuys’ multiples were integral to his artistic strategy and practices. Beuys termed his multiples “vehicles of information,” which could trigger or supplement memories. The multiples helped disseminate his ideas while democratizing the experience of owning an art object and protesting the economics of the art market. Beuys believed that the seriality of the multiples created a relationship between the artist and many collectors, opening new conversations among collectors. The 1992 edition of the catalogue raisonné of Beuys’ multiples lists 557 items. After his limited editions in 1965–70 became the object of speculation, the artist authorized increased production to preserve their accessibility.

The Art Metropole collection was begun informally in 1971 by the three artists who made up General Idea: Felix Partz, Jorge Zontal and AA Bronson. It was legally incorporated in 1972 as an artist-run centre devoted to collecting and distributing art images, including artist books, videos and other multiples. The collection was donated to the National Gallery in 1999 by Jay Smith. This exhibition draws upon the 207 items in the collection that reference Beuys, with an emphasis on those produced during the artist’s lifetime.

NATIONAL GALLERY OF CANADA LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES  
CURATED BY IAN C. FERGUSON

EXHIBITION NO. 53  
04 OCTOBER 2016 – 01 JANUARY 2017

# CHECKLIST

## THE MAN AND HIS MULTIPLES

1. Joseph Beuys, photographed during his performance at the Fluxus Festival of New Art, Technical College Aachen, 20 July 1964, and published in *Joseph Beuys: Techningar och objekt 1937–1970 ur samling van der Grinten = Joseph Beuys: Zeichnungen und Objekte 1937–1970 aus der Sammlung van der Grinten*. Stockholm: Moderna Museet, 1971, illustration 9, n.p. AM 1399  
*This provocative event was timed to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the unsuccessful attempt to assassinate Hitler. Beuys' mix of an ambiguous salute with a Christian symbol occurred after disorder had broken out and a furious student had punched him in the face. This incident and attendant photo made Beuys famous throughout Germany. Inspired by Beuys, German artist Anselm Kiefer would do a series of photographs in 1969 with a similar gesture in historical settings titled Heroic Symbols (Heroische Sinnbilder).*
2. Beuys, Joseph. *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*. Performance at the Galerie Alfred Schmela in Dusseldorf (1965), published in Caroline Tisdall. *Joseph Beuys*. New York: Solomon Guggenheim Museum, 1979, p.p. 102–03. AM 1433  
*For this performance in 1965, Beuys covered his head with honey, gold leaf and dust. A felt sole was attached to his left foot and an iron sole to the right foot. With tenderness and concentration, the artist cradled the hare for 3 hours, presenting his own pictures and whispering explanations. He would periodically step over a dead fir tree, or Tannenbaum, perhaps a withered image of nature or of Germany itself. Art historian Gene Ray has argued that Beuys' art as a whole alludes to the need of atonement for the Holocaust.*
3. Beuys, Joseph. *Friedenshase*. Multiple, lapel button, gold on black. Japan: New Art Seibu, 1984. AM 7645  
*Beuys identified with the hare: "I am the hare, a swift shy creature without a home, just a hollow in the ground and a huge mythology." In *Mediaeval, Celtic and First Nations legends*, the hare is often identified with a trickster character, able to transform itself into other forms.*
4. Joseph Beuys. *Intuition*. Multiple, wooden box with pencil line and handwritten addition. Remscheid, Germany: VICE-Versand, 1968. AM 1521  
*AA Bronson has written of the seminal impact on *General Idea* of this simple object: "We could not imagine life as artists without it." Beuys on occasion used such boxes as framing devices for his sculptures. The owner of this multiple was implicitly invited to place his own object inside, but was also free to leave it empty and reflect on the empty space: a social sculpture.*
5. *Comparación entre dos Tipos de Sociedades/ How the Dictatorship of the Parties can be Overcome*. Multiple, printed carrier bag in polythene. Buenos Aires: Centro de Arte y Comunicación, 1972. AM 7905  
*Beuys founded the Organization for Direct Democracy by Referendum in 1971 as a vehicle to promote his artistic and political goals. The artist handed out shopping bags similar to this example in Cologne. In Berlin, he filled the bags with the garbage left after a May Day demonstration and then displayed them in a gallery. The image, with its complementary red and green colours, evokes the seating plan of a legislative assembly. The graphics were enhanced by text contrasting the status quo with the ideals of the Organization for Direct Democracy. This Spanish-language version was produced without the artist's authorization, but it shows that Beuys' ideas resonated in various political contexts.*
6. *La rivoluzione siamo noi*. Cover title, exhibition catalogue for partitura de Joseph Beuys. Naples: Modern Art Agency, 1971. AM 1400  
*This often-reproduced image of Beuys in his felt trilby hat, fisherman vest, white shirt and blue jeans came to represent his artistic persona. The poster for this exhibition in Naples comprised a two-meter high version of the image. The slogan, "We are the revolution," is consistent with Beuys' belief that every person could be an artist and agent of change in the sense of striving to live with creativity and freedom.*
7. Beuys, Joseph. *Holzpostkarte*. Multiple, postcard, silkscreen on pinewood. Heidelberg: Edition Staeck, 1974. AM 7640  
*This was one of a series of postcards designed by Beuys in inexpensive materials, making them dysfunctional to post, but forming sculptural objects in their own right that could be collected, discussed, exchanged or passed along. They build upon Marcel Duchamp's concept of the "assembled readymade."*
8. Beuys, Joseph. *Cosmas und Damian*. Multiple, postcard. Heidelberg: Edition Staeck, 1974. AM 7653  
*This franked postcard contains a message from Felix Partz to Jorge Zontal, both members of *General Idea*. For Beuys, the recently-constructed World Trade Center towers symbolized a pair of saints from the Roman period. Cosmas and Damian travelled the world performing medical miracles, including grafting limbs from a person of one race onto a person of another. Beuys was intrigued by the saints' partnership and friendship. He compared them to himself and his curator Caroline Tisdall, as the two travelled together frequently to further Beuys' career outside Germany.*
9. Beuys, Joseph. *PVC-Postkarte 'Honey is Flowing'*. Signed multiple, silkscreen on milky-yellow soft PVC. Heidelberg: Edition Staeck, 1974. AM 7641  
*Beuys had studied the work of philosopher Rudolf Steiner who based his theories about human society on the structures of honeybees. Beuys viewed bees and honey production as metaphors for socialism and cooperation. While he was interested in bees throughout his career, this work prefigures his major installation at *Documenta VI* in Kassel in 1977. Entitled, *Honey is Flowing in the Workplace*, it featured two tonnes of honey pumped in a series of tubes around several galleries.*
10. Beuys, Joseph. *Genova*. Multiples, colour postcards with brown silkscreen. One postcard is signed and numbered 54/100. Genoa, Italy: Samangallery, 1976. AM 7650A and 7650B  
*These cards show an overprinted panorama of Genoa by day and its port at night. They were "mailers" used by the Samangallery to promote a Beuys exhibition. One was sent to *General Idea*. At that time, artists often appropriated and re-used items of popular culture and many experimented with the postal system as a low-cost and effective way of circulating art internationally.*
11. Beuys, Joseph. *Filzpostkarte*. Multiple, silkscreen on felt. Heidelberg, Germany: Edition Staeck, 1987. AM 7644  
*Described as protective and muffling, felt was one of Beuys' signature materials. Beuys contrasted "warm sculpture" done in felt, honey, wax and tallow with "cold sculpture" in hard, crystalline materials and metals. In published autobiographical notes, Beuys claimed to have been shot down over the Ukraine during World War II. He said he was rescued by Crimean Tartars who covered his body in fat and felt to preserve warmth. The plane crash and injuries were real, but the remainder of the story may be fabricated.*
12. Beuys, Joseph. *Magnetische Postkarte*. Multiple, iron sheet with embossed writing and magnetized Mainstream, (Beuys) signed and printed cardboard box. Heidelberg: Edition Staeck, 1975. AM 7642  
*The embossed text *Magnetischer Abfall* translates as "Magnetic Rubbish." This may allude to the dysfunctional quality of the object or perhaps to forms of waste harmful to the environment. Beuys was an early ecologist and one of the founders of the Green Party in 1980. The magnetized Mainstream disk recalls everyday fridge magnets used to display postcards.*
13. Tisdall, Caroline. *Coyote*. Two unsigned, undated black and white photographs. AM 1519  
*These photos document "I Like America and America Likes Me," Beuys' 1974 performance at the René Block Gallery in New York. After arriving by ambulance, rolled in felt, Beuys spent three days with a coyote in the Gallery's window space. The semi-wild coyote had been raised in captivity and gradually accepted Beuys' presence. The artist then left New York by the same means as a form of protest against American involvement in Vietnam. The coyote often plays the role of trickster in North American indigenous folklore. The photographer, Caroline Tisdall, also functioned as Beuys' amanuensis and informal ambassador to the English-speaking world for over a decade.*
14. Murken, Axel Hinrich. *Joseph Beuys und die Medizin*. Münster, Germany: F. Coppenrath Verlag, 1979. AM 1426  
*This book references Beuys' interest in pregnancy, birth and anatomy. The artist had once taken pre-medical courses. The felt-covered book forms a sculptural object in its own right, or may suggest a field manual. The colour of the felt cover evokes Beuys' use of braunkreuz (German for "brown cross"), a sculptural medium the artist created from house paint often mixed with hare's blood, which he considered a metaphor for the earth.*