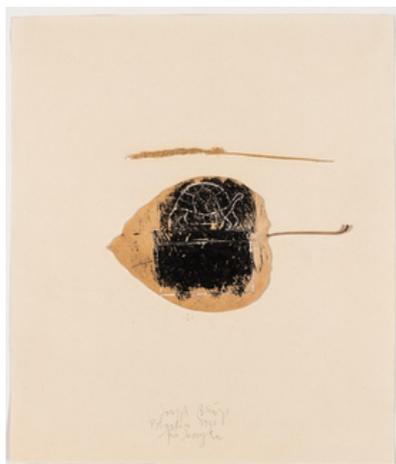


Joseph Beuys

Line to Line, Leaf by Leaf

Drawings from the Beuys family collection

10 December 2021 – 27 March 2022



"The drawing is the extension of the idea." Joseph Beuys

To mark the centenary of the birth of Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), which has given rise to numerous events throughout the year 2021, the Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris is presenting the exhibition *Joseph Beuys: Line to line. Leaf by Leaf*, previously shown at the Dresden Print, Drawing and Photography Cabinet (Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen Dresden) from July 23 to October 17, 2021.

In the course of his life Beuys made more than 10,000 drawings: a quantity that points up the centrality of this discipline to the oeuvre as a whole and constitutes an inexhaustible source of insight into one of the 20th century's most emblematic artists.

The nearly one hundred drawings exhibited here are of a highly symbolic nature. Taken from the Beuys family collection, this exceptional group of drawings, which covers the entire career of the artist, has never before been exhibited in its entirety.

This body of work highlights the central role the artist has given to drawing. Like a matrix linking his activities, it comprises explorations of forms, symbols, and scores for actions, installations, and simple notes. Beuys kept his drawings in a pile, using them as a storehouse of ideas he could re-infuse into his work, sometimes years later.

For more than fifty years, Beuys translated his ideas onto paper with great freedom of expression and precision of line. Drawing was his way of understanding the world. According to him, "drawings [were] closer to reality than other genres of so-called reality."

Combining organic and vegetal materials with pencil or watercolour, these drawings address recurring themes in his work: animality, the relationship to nature, the perpetual transformation of the living.

The exhibition is organized in cooperation with the Kupferstich-Kabinett, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen Dresden.

PRESS RELEASE

Museum director

Fabrice Hergott

Curators

Fanny Schulmann, curator
Nadia Chalbi, assistant curator
Mailena Mallach, assistant curator
at Staatliche Kunstsammlungen
Dresden, associate curator of the
exhibition

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Joseph Beuys
Für Jessyka
1980
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Photo: Andreas Diesend

Visitor information

Musée d'Art Moderne de Paris
11 Avenue du Président Wilson
75116 Paris
Tel. 01 53 67 40 00
www.mam.paris.fr

Open Tuesday – Sunday
10 am – 6 pm

Admission

Full rate: 6 €
Concessions: 4 €

Cultural activities

Information and bookings
Tel. 01 53 67 40 80

Press officer

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Exhibition itinerary

1. Zirkulationszeit - Circulation Time

On several occasions, Beuys brought together drawings from different eras, formats and themes so as to put them into dialogue in the form of exhibitions and publications. These ensembles constitute transversal works, which Beuys considered as tools for better knowing the world and himself, such as the suite *Zirkulationszeit*.

Published in 1982, it comprises 21 drawings, most of which date back to the beginning of his career, and are reproduced in etchings. All of these drawings, except for one, remain in the Beuys Family Collection.

"Circulation time" is an economic term for the period during which capital circulates in the form of a commodity, without financial profit, before being converted back into capital. The drawings primarily represent living beings, both humans and animals. The importance of the figure of the stag, the artist's animal alter ego, testifies to the personal dimension of this suite. Economics is at the heart of Beuys' reflection on the value and role of art, as a means of struggle and critique of capitalism

2. Encounters with Animals

With "their instinctive capacity to perceive the soul and their superpower of direction" (Beuys), animals, connected to humans through sensory perception, occupy a central place in the artist's conceptual world. Beuys' work focuses particularly on a small group of species that were familiar to him: the bee, deer, elk, bear, goat, sheep, swan, goose, duck, rabbit and wolf. Beuys ascribed a symbolic meaning to the protagonists of his artistic world, to which specific characteristics were associated: "The bee is industrious, the stag proud, and the rabbit brings Easter eggs" (Beuys).

In his drawings, Beuys reveals himself to be a sensitive observer of these different species. He had access to academic literature and scientific depictions of animals mainly through his father-in-law, zoologist Hermann Wurmbach. Certain drawings dating from the late 1950s were done as teaching aids for Eva Beuys, who at that time, was beginning her training in teaching art to children.

Others are linked to the personal history of the Beuys family, such as this turtle stamped on a *Stephania* leaf coated in eyeshadow, which Beuys gave to his daughter Jessyka as a souvenir of a stay in the Seychelles.

3. Figural Lines

The drawings of human figures attest to Beuys' great concern for the individual as a thinking and communicating being, in relation with his or her environment. They also show moving bodies, dense and vivid, and explore dualities like connection and isolation, transformation and permanence, reason and play, and of course, life and death. Beuys was also interested in the human metabolism, circulation and growth. With the female body, he examined the functions of birth and nurturing. Beuys used transparent paper, paper from sketch books, writing pads, note paper, and thick cardboard as support material. He worked with a pencil and brush in watercolor, including some liquids that are occasionally difficult to identify. The material qualities of the medium often contribute to the expressive content of the drawings. In these compositions, the lines recreate the structure and skeleton of the human being, while the flowing substances suggest growth and change.

4. Earthlines

The group of “Mountain Drawings” as they are called by the family explores the theme of the landscape. Although a horizon line provides a human scale, nature remains untouched by any signs of people, plants, trees or animals. The thin linear structure suggests a natural environment without precisely illustrating it. For Beuys, what was most important was to capture the landscape as a whole. These drawings are the transcription of tremors or energy that pushes out rocks. We can sense the Earth’s internal convulsions. At times, certain shapes evoke anthropomorphic landscapes. Beuys was particularly influenced by the plains of Lower Rhine region, close to the Dutch border, near where he grew up. His later pencil drawings are a fundamentally different experience of the landscape. The drawings of mountains come mostly from sketchbooks. These may have been sketched during his travels, but may also be highly personal drawings evoking more than just a concrete representation of landscapes, such as personal blockages and crises, or “the inner mountains of the self” (Beuys).

5. Plant material

Beuys revealed the principle of change, growth and metamorphosis in nature, including in the collages of pressed and dried plant materials that run through all of his work. He created the earliest in the 1940s, when he gave up studying the natural sciences to devote himself to art. These works, which are much more than mere documentation of the natural world and flora, generate reflection on the essence of natural matter—on the healing properties, meaning and images evoked by these carefully collected plants. His works are reminiscent of the artistic

herbaria of the Renaissance, which presented and indexed plants from different countries, based on the principles of collecting and proto-scientific methodology. Beuys, who advocated for the development of a social and ecological consciousness driven by creativity, continued to make plant collages into the 1980s. This activity can be linked to some of his most significant actions, in particular the one carried out for *Documenta 7* in Kassel, in 1982, when he inaugurated his project to plant 7 000 oak trees. Some of the works exhibited here refer to *Difesa della natura* (Defence of Nature), a long-term project that the artist developed in Abruzzo, Italy in the 1970s and 1980s, where he undertook to plant 7 000 endangered trees and shrubs.

6. Sculptural

In 1961, Beuys was appointed as a professor of monumental sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts. He understood his whole activity as sculpture through the concept of “social sculpture” that he would develop throughout his career. “You can do something with sculpture. Everything is sculpture!” he declared in his last speech.

Beuys’s work as a sculptor is closely connected to his drawings, which constitute a starting point. With it, he developed his artistic stance: “Resulting from the drawings were concepts, a sculptural theory.”

Sculpture can have different meanings. For Beuys, the drawing on paper was not to be understood merely as a two-dimensional work; it had the potential for embodiment. He produced his works using different substances endowed with specific properties or symbolism: crystalline or amorphous, cold or warm, still or fluid. A work is also sculptural in that it inspires thought, “A discussion about powers will get going.” (Beuys). This ensemble of drawings illustrates some of the fundamental aspects of his thinking and invites the viewer to debate the link between art and life, as well as the dissolution of the narrow boundaries between genres.

Visitor information

MUSÉE D'ART MODERNE DE PARIS

Postal address

11, Avenue du Président Wilson, 75116 Paris Tel. 01 53 67 40 00
www.mam.paris.fr

Public transport

- Metro: Alma-Marceau ou Léna (line 9)
- Bus: 32 / 42 / 63 / 72 / 80 / 92
- Velib's bike stations : 4 rue de Longchamp ; 4 avenue Marceau ; place de la reine Astrid ; 45 avenue Marceau ou 3 avenue Bosquet
- Bike: Bicycle parking spaces are available in front of the museum entrance.
- RER C: Pont de l'Alma (line C)

Opening hours

- Tuesday-Sunday, 10am-6pm (last entry 5:15pm)
- Closed Monday and some public holidays

Admission

Full rate: 6 €
Concessions: 4 €
Free for under 18

The exhibition is accessible to people with motor disabilities and reduce mobility.

Wearing a mask is mandatory from the age of 11, hydro-alcoholic gel is provided, temperature is checked and the visitor will have to follow a direction of visit.

Reservation of a time-stamped ticket to access the exhibitions is advised www.billetterie-parismusees.paris.fr

In accordance with regulations, proof of vaccination must be presented at the museum entrance.

Press Officer

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