Front cover image: Joseph Beuys, Filzanzug (Felt suit) 1970
Opposite: Joseph Beuys/Werner Krüger, Output 5, Joseph Beuys: head and hand, from the portfolio Output 1972-1978, printed 1980
JOSEPH BEUYS
AND THE ‘ENERGY PLAN’

CURATED BY DONNA WEST BRETTE

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

THE FIRST OF FOUR EXHIBITIONS CELEBRATING THE
50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE JW POWER BEQUEST
The Energy Plan (and only for this reason was Beuys able to identify with it so explicitly) is the transformation of Beuysian aesthetic-artistic creativity, his cosmos of ideas, his plastic imagery into photography. The individual photo reflects details and the entire installation reflects the authentic world of Beuys’s ideas and images. (Werner Krüger)

This exhibition features works by Joseph Beuys acquired from the JW Power Bequest in the 1970s and early '80s by Elwyn Lynn, then curator of the collection. These include multiples such as Filzanzug (Felt suit) (1970), Erdtelephon (Earth telephone) (1972), Pflasterstein (Cobblestone) from Strassenaktion (Street action) (1975), and a selection of posters, prints and other objects. The exhibition also includes a series of photographs taken by the art-critic and photographer Werner Krüger of Beuys’s installations from 1972 to 1979. Krüger played a significant role in building the representation of German artists for the Power Collection as both a friend and advisor to Lynn for more than a decade. A number of works by important German artists were acquired with the assistance of Krüger, often directly from artists’ studios such as Günter Weseler’s Atem Objekt (Breathing object) (1972), a work with Beuysian overtones in its unusual conjunction of materials: bread, fur, wood and an electrical motor.

Joseph Beuys’s multi-disciplinary interests in medicine, science, art, myth and history form the basis of his diverse body of work that explores the qualities of natural materials. His vast output includes drawing, printmaking, sculpture, installation, lectures and performance, all of which interconnected with his interest in politics and in education. One of Beuys’s central experimental philosophies was that of the ‘Energy Plan’ which formed part of his expanded conception of art as a form of ‘social sculpture’. His idea of the ‘Energy Plan’ as a source of creative freedom, found expression through various artistic practices and formed the basis of his now famous lecture-tour to America in 1974. Titled Energy Plan for the Western Man, the tour/action was influenced in part by the writings of Rudolf Steiner, a source of inspiration for Beuys. The ‘Energy Plan’ formed part of a much larger project of the Free International University of Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research established in Düsseldorf by Beuys, including the Nobel prize winning novelist Heinrich Böll and others following Beuys’s dismissal from the Kunstakademie in 1972. Beuys’s Weltanschauung (world view) was conceived in terms of energies and alchemical polarities — cold and warm, soft and hard, life and death, past and present, east and west, north and south — and the ways in which energies are transferred through natural materials, plants and animals. As Gottfried Boehm notes, Beuys’s view of life forces was shamanic allowing him to register differing energy states, their respective charges and materials, whilst also referencing the sensory capacity of human beings.
MATERIAL AND FORM

Beuys’s use of diverse natural materials such as fat, felt, copper and stone are specifically associated with spiritual transcendence, warmth, healing and energy and feature in several of the works in this exhibition and in the series of photographs by Krüger.

For example, *Felt suit* is a multiple based on one of Beuys’s own suits. Hung on the wall from a wooden coat hanger, the suit stands in for his body, becoming both a self-portrait and a statement about spiritual and protective warmth. For Beuys, felt signifies life-generating energies, the meaning of which was formed from both autobiographical and mythical narratives. In 1944, while serving in the German Air Force Beuys’s plane was shot down over Crimea and nomadic Tartars rescued him and wrapped him in fat and felt to survive the freezing conditions. He considered this event as a spiritual rebirth, a cleansing of his past and his associations with the German Armed Forces and National Socialism.

Beuys’s use of felt as a healing element is extensive and can be seen in several of Krüger’s photographs of Beuys’s works in the series *Energieplan – Joseph Beuys – a foto environment* (1979), including *Eurasian staff – symbol for future unity* and *Felt cover of grand piano – silence Beuys*. In this photograph the protective piano cover made from sound absorbing felt, hangs from the wall like a ragged body or animal skin and is covered by a number of red crosses. The cross, which also appears in Beuys’s signature stamp, is one of several motifs repeated across his works that relate to his concept of healing energy. As Richard Hamilton noted in an interview with Beuys, the symbol of the cross can be read either
as the electrical symbol for positive energy, or as the Red Cross symbol.\(^5\) Beuys developed the now famous brown cross through various transitions, which reflect an interest in the healing power of the body, the mind and the spirit. Felt also covers the wooden *Eurasienstab* (*Eurasian staff*) (1967) to which a massive bent copper rod is attached. The ‘Eurasian theme’ in Beuys’s work derives from Steiner’s concept of a mythical continent known as Eurasia representing the crossroads of East and West. Felt also makes an appearance as a protective layer in between copper plates, rolled up as swags or as the base for printed works referencing the practice of inserting blankets between the base-plate and the roller in printing presses. The combination of felt and copper in *Fond III* (1969) uses a layering principle so that energy storage is “synthesised with the processes of receiving, conducting and transmitting energy”. The layers of felt act as a storage element and the copper sheets form a conductive link between the exterior and the interior forming a power station. The blocks of felt and copper, with their qualities of receiving and transmitting energy, act as a battery to absorb heat and sound.\(^6\) Beuys’s use of the battery can also been seen in the photograph *Fond II–the batteries* (1979) and in *Stag hunt* (1979) where the layers of tied up newspaper act as conductive battery units. According to Caroline Tisdall, Beuys saw newspapers as an “incredibly rich cross-section of human activities and specialisations on record, a battery of ideas”.\(^7\)

Another consistent motif that runs through Beuys’s objects and actions is the hare. In *Output 1, Joseph Beuys: fat and rabbit* (1980), the hare acts as a fertility symbol; the chocolate Easter bunny figure warmed by a light bulb has its power cord wrapped around a lump of fat. Fat in turn represents chaotic energy; when it is cold it is solid and can be shaped, but when it is warm it flows – undefined and formless.\(^8\) Another animal that recurs in his work is the stag, endowed with spiritual powers and insight, as it accompanies the soul through life’s journey.

In 1980, Beuys’s drawing series *Energie Plan* was exhibited at the Kunsthalle in Bielefeld, accompanied by sixty-four Cibachrome photographs of his work and performances taken by Werner Krüger. Each photograph in the series *‘Energy Plan - Joseph Beuys’, photo-environment by Werner Krüger* (1972-1979), was signed by Beuys on the front and Krüger on the back. At the same time Krüger was making the documentary film *Joseph Beuys: everybody is an artist*, which Krüger has often shown in discussions and lectures on the artist’s work.\(^9\) Lynn selected ten photographs on a visit to Krüger’s studio from another set of approximately eighty photographs printed slightly smaller, known in the Power Collection as *Energieplan – Joseph Beuys – a foto-environment* (1979). Several of these photographs were taken in the permanent display of Beuys’s works at the Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, a permanent loan from the collection of industrialist Karl Ströher who had purchased the entire exhibition from Beuys’s first large one-man show in 1967. Beuys installed the exhibition across seven rooms to represent a Gesamtkunstwerk “a total work of art, in which sculptures, action tools, paintings, drawing, and musical scores are combined into a harmonious whole of immense physical and intellectual density.”\(^10\) The photographs can be seen not only as documents of Beuys’s actions and as representing the Energy Plan, but also as relics of the installations. Beuys was sensitive to the way in which the viewer would encounter his installations, and at times objects were placed as physical obstacles around which the viewer would navigate. The idea of the warming nature of certain materials is emphasised by the tones of Krüger’s photographs that enhance our viewing process and accentuate Beuys’s concept of the ‘Energy Plan’ and of his concept of the dynamic nature of colour.
RELICS, ACTIONS AND MULTIPLES

Several of the works in the exhibition are relics and multiples that result from Beuys’s political and artistic actions. Examples include Fahne (Flag) (1974) from an action at the art fair at IKI Düsseldorf October 1974 and 1a gebratene Fischgräte (Hering) (1st class grilled fishbones [herring]) (1970), which was produced with Daniel Spoerri in the Eat Art Galerie in Düsseldorf. As Beuys said, “In some cases the edition has to be limited because it just isn’t technically possible to do it any other way. After all, I don’t feel like frying fishbones for the rest of my life!” In contrast, the multiple So kann die Parteiendiktatur überwunden werden (How the Dictatorship of the Parties Can Be Overcome) (1971), in an edition of 10,000 (500 examples include the felt rectangle) was distributed by Beuys at documenta V in Kassel, 1972. Lynn brought back the examples in this exhibition for the Power Collection.

Another multiple, Pflasterstein (Cobblestone) (1975) is from a political street action that Beuys conducted in 1975, and the collection holds three of the 50 examples in this limited edition. The incorporation of stones in Beuys’s works is connected to the political, social, artistic and spiritual; from street protests to the basalt geometry of Northern Ireland’s Giant’s Causeway, stones evoke doom, another cycle beginning or a symbol of hope. One of the many works Beuys made for Caroline Tisdall, Northern Irish tongue (1975) is made from a small framed ‘shot’ photograph of Beuys by Ute Klophaus, and a piece of masonry that was blasted off a building in Belfast during Beuys’s lecture tour in Northern Ireland. Unintimidated by the violence, Beuys perceived a specific energy in the Irish people that made him determined to develop a dialogue and to foster his ‘war of ideas’.

The process of editioning work is an outcome of Beuys’s philosophical belief in democratic and political art and his perception of the temporality of things. The multiple screenprint on felt, Erdtelephon (Earth telephone) (1972), for example, is based on the original Das Erdtelephon (1967), a sculpture consisting of a telephone and a clay sphere, which is on permanent display in Darmstadt and can be seen in one of the Krüger photographs. For Beuys, the combination of the telephone with a lump of earth is a declaration about the nature of electricity as it runs underground, and its energy quality can be characterised by a minus sign. Connecting to earth’s energies for Beuys is a transcendental, mystical and physical act that forges pathways between the mind, the body and the earth.

In one of his most significant performance pieces as political demonstration, Beuys and a group of fifty students took to the Grafenberger woods in Düsseldorf to protest against the planned removal of a local forest to make way for tennis courts. The group used birch brooms to sweep the floor of the forest, marking the action as restorative and connecting the individuals to the earth through the physical motion. A Teutonic rite was also enacted with Beuys and the students marking the trees with symbols of rings and crosses signifying a protective ritual. Overcome Party Dictatorship Now (1971) was taken during this action and is an example of the significance that trees played in Beuys’s work.

At documenta VII in Kassel 1982, Beuys commenced a project of planting 7000 oak trees, each accompanied by a basalt stele; beginning in Kassel it extended around the world. In 1979, international curator René Block planted one of the oaks outside the Art Gallery of New South Wales. 7000 Eichen has since become an expansive, monumental work, which was completed by Beuys’s widow and son after his death. Additional trees continue to be planted by the DIA Art Foundation in New York extending their original participation as sponsors of the project. Although 7000 Eichen can be seen as a typical Beuysian social sculpture and regenerative project, oak trees in particular have significance in German myth, folklore and national identity. The woods are saturated in historical and mythical references that are continuously reinforced by political policy and a cultural impetus that sees the Teutonic forest as significant to national identity and the idea of Heimat or homeland. From the Teutonic forests and Grimm’s fairy tales, to Hitler’s appropriation of the oak to signify the indestructible Reich, the GDR’s extensive reforestation program and inauguration of ‘Day of the tree’ in 1952, trees and forests continue to form part of German identity. Beuys’s use of the trees in his forest actions and in the 7000 Eichen project can be seen, alongside his ‘Energy Plan’, as an attempt to extend the healing nature of earthly energies through natural materials to his own country’s history and across the world.

Notes
4  The descriptive titles of the photographs from the series Energieplan – Joseph Beuys – a foto environment were given by Elwyn Lynn at the point of acquisition.
5  Eva, Wenzel and Jessyka Beuys, Joseph Beuys Block Beuys, Schirmer Mosel, Munich, 1997, p. 11.
8  See Tisdall, Bits and pieces, p. 14.
9  Author in correspondence with Krüger, 3 February 2012.
10  See Schirmer Mosel, 1997 ibid
13  Tisdall, ‘Beuys and the Celtic world’, p. 115.
14  Joseph Beuys interview 1970 Edition Schellman GmBH, 1985, ibid
LIST OF WORKS

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Joseph Beuys
Filzanzug (Felt suit) 1970
felt, cotton, ink on synthetic fabric and metal safety pins, ed 69/100
160 x 73 x 2 cm
acquired 1972, PW1972.5.a-c

Ia gebratene Fischgräte (Hering) (1st class grilled fishbones [herring]) 1970
dried herring, resin, oil, pencil, ink, cotton thread in printed cardboard box, AP, ed 25
35.9 x 28.9 x 18.9 cm
acquired 1972, PW1972.4

So kann die Parteieid摘erkennung überwunden werden (How the Dictatorship of the Parties Can Be Overcome) 1971
multiples of plastic shopping bag containing printed sheets, some with rubber stamp additions, and felt object, art intermedia, Cologne, ed 10,000
variable dimensions
acquired 1973, PW1973.2.a-c; PW1973.3.a-b

Zwei Frauen auf Schneeschuhen (Two women on snowshoes)
off-set lithograph from multiple bag How the Dictatorship of the Parties Can Be Overcome
90.5 x 68 cm
acquired 1973, PW1973.29

off-set lithograph
28.8 x 40 cm
acquired 1973, PW1973.30

Fahne (Flag) 1974
model train, synthetic fabric and copper wire in cardboard carton
44.8 x 35.6 x 6 cm, ed 2/12
acquired 1982, PW1982.6

New beginnings are in the offing 1974
photo-offset lithograph
58 x 43 cm, ed 85/400
Donated by Mrs A Scheinberg 1983
PW1983.3

Erdtelephon, (Earth telephone) 1972
screenprint on felt paper, ed VIII/XII
98.9 x 59.8 cm
acquired 1975, PW1975.1

Meeting of Lady Rosebery, Joseph Beuys and Buckminster Fuller, Black and White Oil Conference, Edinburgh 1974
photo-offset lithograph
66 x 84 cm, ed 218/400
Donated by Mrs A Scheinberg 1983
PW1983.4

Pflasterstein (Cobblestone) from Strassenaktion (Street action) 1975
Three basalt cobblestones, asphalt and ink, ed a) 28/50 b) 29/50 c) 30/50
15 x 14 x 15.15 cm; 14.5 x 15 x 15 cm; 14 x 14.5 x 14.2 cm (approx)
signed and numbered, black marker pen, stamped with a number, title, artist’s name and name of his political party
acquired 1976, PW1976.4.1, 2, 3

Joseph Beuys/Werner Krüger
From the portfolio Output 1972-1978, printed 1980, acquired 1982

Output 1
Joseph Beuys: fat and rabbit 1980
black and white photograph
31 x 22.1 cm
PW1982.24.9

Output 5
Joseph Beuys: head and hand 1980
black and white photograph
22.1 x 31 cm
PW1982.24.28

Output 6
Joseph Beuys with grill 1980
black and white photograph
22.1 x 31 cm
PW1982.24.29

Output 29
Joseph Beuys: fat 1980
black and white photograph
22.1 x 31 cm
PW1982.24.7

From the series Energieplan – Joseph Beuys – a foto environment 1979
Acquired 1980

Magnet
cibachrome photograph
30.2 x 40.5 cm
PW1980.44.1

Joseph Beuys with Charles Wilp
Kenia korallenkalksand from the portfolio Sandzeichnungen 1974
coral sand in a glass test tube, cork and cardboard
21 x 8 x 4.7 cm
acquired 1980, PW1980.7.19

Günter Weseler
Atemobjekt (Breathing object) 1972
bread, fur, wood, electrical motor
13 x 25 x 47 cm
acquired 1972, PW1972.63.a-c
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Donna West Brett is a doctoral candidate in Art History and Film Studies at the University of Sydney. Her research area is ‘Documenting place in German photography after 1945’.

PUBLIC PROGRAMS

LUNCHTIME TALKS
Wednesday 18 April, 12–1pm, Donna West Brett, exhibition curator, on Beuys and his documenter Werner Krüger.

Wednesday 2 May, 12–1pm, Anthony Bond, Director, Curatorial, Art Gallery of New South Wales, on Beuys and his legacy.

SYMPOSIUM
A BATTERY OF IDEAS: READING BEUYS TODAY
SATURDAY 5 MAY 2012, 2–4.30PM
Philosophy Room S249, The Quadrangle
This symposium will present various ways of reading Beuys today, from performance art to relational aesthetics. Speakers include Thomas Berghuis, Anthony Bond, Donna West Brett, Janet Laurence, Bernice Murphy and Tom Nicholson.
Co-presented with The Power Institute.

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