

**JOSEPH
BEUYS**

**A VIDEO
PROGRAMME**

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Requisites and Relics

Joseph Beuys
and the film

A role to play?

Speaking: the artist. With the face to the wall, back to the camera. It, however, keeps him in view, without moving, 11 minutes long. Joseph Beuys lectures - as always, if he feels the slightest chance that he will be listened to. Once again the theme is the concept of art, creativity, the social organism. In this almost artless art film, made in 1981, and titled simply "Beuys", Werner Nekes and Dore O. push the well known model of the television cultural programme to an extreme. They stand the artist up against a wall and aim the camera at him. He, however, takes this short-lived, supposed joke seriously. He talks and talks and in the end perhaps he is not talking only to the wall.

Who other than Joseph Beuys could make a parody of film and television's art reports, without it being just a parody? The most important and at the same time the most controversial German artist of the present day was an object of the media as no other before him. The figure had something special, but not just the external appearance. Was and is the figure possibly more interesting than the work? Beuys as a product of the media world? He himself took a standpoint to this: "I have tried to use my person and my life as a tool." And so he disdained no role and no forum to express or make himself understood; used satellite television or open discussion, was sculptor and actor, shaman and teacher, turned art into politics and politics into art.

Sensibility to sense

Speaking: the artist. Why does Joseph Beuys speak? Those who study his performances, installations and objects are repeatedly confronted with acoustic phenomena. Beginning with almost "classical" piano concerts with Nam June Paik (e.g. "In Memoriam George Maciunas", p.12), to mute technical communication appliances (e.g. amplifiers in "Das Kapital") to the noise performances (coughing, whistling, hissing, roaring over the microphone; as in the "ÖÖ-Aktion", 1967) - hearing as a channel of perception in art, is always considered. Analogous illustrations are found in the drawings of the human hearing organ, the outer ear, mouth and tongue movement and sound waves. For Beuys drawing did not serve only as sketch and illustration, but was also speech expansion and an attempt to

Requisites...

"go further than the usurpation of speech through cultural development and rationality". And so speech and hearing are to be understood in a wider sense, namely as a universal sound world, completely outside the verbalization.

However, the function of speech as a carrier of information is not to be shut out in any way. Beuys, on the work of a revolutionary, as he understood himself: "He can transport information through the physical side of speech... He must use the power that is behind the corporality also to move the corporality of his surroundings with the stream of air that is moved through the wind-pipes, that is pressed through the larynx and reaches into further speech organs (tongue, palate, teeth, mouth). He must sculpture something into these air streams which has to be ex-formed by the receiver."

How Joseph Beuys uses the voice as "a direct substance for sculpturing thought forms", is not only to be experienced in a distilled and concentrated form in the film "Beuys", but also in documentations of speeches and discussions. In this way he developed his concept of the invisible sculpture in a speech in the Museum Boymans-van Beuningen, Rotterdam, in 1979 (p.14). In 1984 an interview ("From here out...", p.16) gave him the opportunity to explain his standpoint on the German question, in a very decided manner.

Monuments instead of media

The proclamatory claim of Joseph Beuys is not only visibly appearing in his complete work but also belongs to it's constitutional terms ("I'm interested in spreading ideas." This leads to the (not market orientated) tactics to supplement the unique performances, which can be seen only by few spectators, with multiple objects. The multiples (reproduced objects, that can be compared to prints and graphics) are mostly made up of performance relics, prints, postcards and series of photographs. There are films of some important performances that appear in the list of works in this category, too: "Felt TV" (p.7), "Trans-Siberian Railway" (p.8) and "Celtic + ~~~~".

Normally, today, these copies of films or video tapes combined with small relics or photographs of the respective performances, are boxed up, stamped, numbered, and signed and than stored in show cases

and...

in museums or by collectors, where they unfold rather little of their revolutionary energy. On the contrary, the artist's intention corresponds to the public screening of such documents. Both the multiples and the relics were, for Beuys, instruments of his proclamatory intention. He saw them as antennae, distributed everywhere, that stayed in contact with him and his ideas. In an early film ("Social Sculptur", p.6) he tries to make contact with the anonymous viewer, quiet directly.

The hole

In 1959 Joseph Beuys made a rough draft of an environment that could only be seen through a hole in the wall, from a single viewpoint. The installation with the title "Trans-Siberian Railway" was realized two years later, but not in the originally planned form. It was a film with the same title (p.8) that takes the imaginary form of the peep hole principle. The camera takes the ideal position of the viewer and, 22 minutes long, doesn't move its position. The lens takes the role of the hole.

Beuys drew many holes. He tore them out of paper, broke through museum walls to install stove pipes, and at the documenta 1977 he had the hose pipes of his "Honey Pump" put through holes in the wall to the "workshop", which was the Free International University, founded by him. A hole bundles, focuses, determines the view. The hole is an opening between two worlds. A hole opens the way from one level to another. Formed and shaped energy, also thought energy can flow through a hole. A hole drawing from 1961 carries the title "Camera".

The beginning at the end

Film seems to be the most obvious medium to record the time and space demanding sculptural process which structures and works the form of physical and spiritual materials and constitute what is Beuys' artistic work. Especially the films about his performances are, so to say, spiritual performance relics (together with the already mentioned there is for example "Sweeping up", p.10), corresponding to the material objects that one finds in exhibitions. Are these remnants solely recordable evidence for past work?

Beuys, himself, showed the way to work with the results

Relics

of his workshop. The objects from performances would be used for stock in new works, sometimes put to one side (not put to show) or became parts of environments. During the performance "Celtic + ~~~~" (p.9) in 1971, the films "Eurasian Staff" and "Trans-Siberian Railway" were shown; a practice of the meta-performance, that Beuys often used. In this way all his pieces of work are loaded with energy from earlier work, arousing and provoking future sculptural processes. The most important elements of Beuys' aesthetics are movement, expansion of perception and a summoning quality. Seemingly incomplete and provisional, the lack of finish corresponds to some of the films. The artistic work continues, the film showing and the thoughts set free in this way belong to the process. Beuys: "We have not yet reached art."

The video programme presented here contains recordings from performances, speeches and interviews with Joseph Beuys, as well as some experimental films in which he was a co-worker. The arrangement of the texts follows the chronological order of the films and is not necessarily thought of as a recommendation for a programme sequence. The video tape "Eurasian Staff" (1968) which can be obtained from Institute for Cultural Relationships, Stuttgart, and also the portrait film "Everyone is an Artist", from Inter Nationes, Bonn, can both be significant additions to the programme. The Goethe-Institute and the author wish to thank the directors and producers of the films for their friendly permission to show the films.

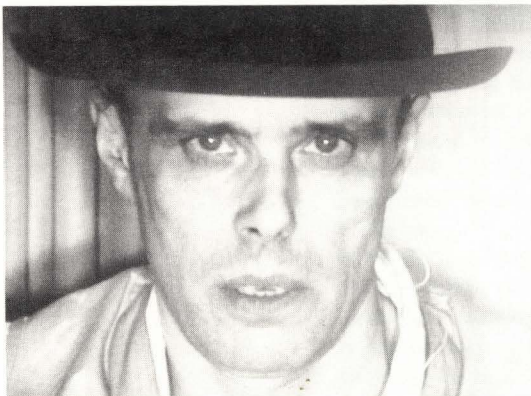
Social Sculpture

Production: Mommartzfilm, Düsseldorf, 1969

Direction, script, camera: Lutz Mommartz

11 minutes, black and white, silent

Production format: 16 mm



In 1969 the Düsseldorf film-maker Lutz Mommartz asked Joseph Beuys to work with him on an experimental documentary film project, that was to confront several people with a running camera upon entering a room. Beuys and two other people took part and the result can be seen in the film "400 m IFF". During this work Beuys and Mommartz developed another film idea, which has been realized in the film presented here. Beuys should consciously attempt to relate to the anonymous viewer. Beuys looks uninterruptedly into the camera in two equally long fixed takes of a format filling portrait (the hat is only partly seen). We feel his tension, excitement and concentration.

Here, the conception of the "social sculpture" is formulated in an extreme reduction and consequence, in the film medium. Reaching over space and time, the sculpture develops through the contact between Beuys, the film-maker and the viewer, and mediated through the camera and projector. Each time the film is shown, the social situation is different and so the sculpture changes also.

The one sided communication from Beuys to the anonymous viewer continues without words, only in looks and facial movements. This film, then, is a reversal and complement to Werner Nekes' and Dore O.s film "Beuys" shot 12 years later (see p. 15) in which the artist speaks, but with his back turned to the viewer. The fixed frontal posture, as seen in these shots, is also an element in other performances of Joseph Beuys, e.g. "Eurasian Staff" from 1967/68 and "Celtic + ~~~~" from 1971 (see p.9). It can be understood as a break in movement and a moment of peace and concentration, although at the same time the flow of spiritual energy reaches a maximum.

Felt TV

Production: Gerry Schum, Düsseldorf, 1970

Camera: Gerry Schum

11 minutes, black and white, sound

Without speech

Production format: 16 mm

Beuys carried out the performance shown here for the first time in 1966. In 1970 he repeated the performance with the same requisites, in front of the camera, for the programme "Identifications", made by Gerry Schum in his "TV Gallery". Later a lengthened version of the film production was transferred onto video tape and sold with some of the relics of the performance as a multiple.

Beuys sits in front of an old fashioned television set that has felt stuck over the screen. The sound is switched on and one can hear a sort of political discussion. Beuys lifts a corner of the felt and a flickering white screen can be seen. Then he puts on a pair of boxing gloves and strikes himself with blows in the face, several times. A second, closer frame shows how he cuts a blutwurst (sausage) in two and feels his way over the felt screen with the blutwurst as if using a stethoscope. He cuts the open end of the blutwurst to make a square stamp and then stands up, goes over to the wall of the room and presses the sausage onto it. Lastly he rolls the television over to the wall in front of a felt cloth that's hanging there.



Trans-Siberian Railway

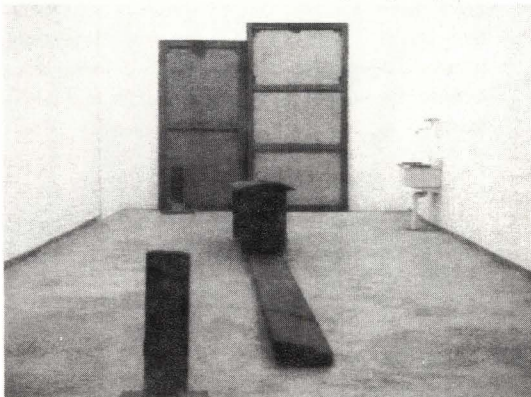
Production: Group 1, Darmstadt, 1970

Camera: Ole John

22 minutes, black and white, sound

Without speech

Production format: 16 mm



The installation "Trans-Siberian Railway" was conceived by Beuys in 1959, but first realized in 1961. Today it is part of the so called "Beuys Block" in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt. The original concept was to set up the objects in an inaccessible wooden shed where those wishing to view them could only do so by looking through a hole in the boards. This idea was never realized in this form but a simulation of it is seen in this film, made in the Louisiana-Museum in Humlebaek, Denmark. 22 minutes long the camera takes the planned stand-point of the spectator and so determines the framed view that the film watcher sees, as if he was peeping into the wooden barracks and seeing the environment.

"We look into a white, bare, grey room, in which objects are set up at widely separated reference points, giving long, stretched out perspectives, suggesting open, if not endless-infinite space. Freely placed, the posts, board, box and canvas frames give knowledge about this de-limitation in unclear light. Finally, de-limitation of time too, in stretched, static watching through the camera: no change, no action, no panning of the lens to deliver fixed points for a measuring of time."

So describes Jörn Merkert the first minutes of this meditative film. Suddenly the picture sways and doubles as if the eye of the camera has become tired. After a while Beuys walks into the room and starts to work. Before he leaves the scene again, he draws a chalk line on the floor, which joins the individual objects with one another, and steers and emphasizes the direction of the viewers vision. After this intervention the frame is held for a long time.

Celtic +

Production: Schellmann & Klüser, Munich, 1971

Camera: Bernd Klüser

25 minutes, black and white, sound

Without speech

Production format: Super 8

The performance was conceived for and performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 1970 under the title "Celtic (Kinloch Ranoch), Scottish Symphony" - with Henning Christiansen. This documentary film was shot on the 5th of April 1971 during the performance in the so called "civil shelters" in Basel.

"Beuys begins with the washing of 7 persons feet. Surrounded at first only by photographers and film people, the circle of spectators closes in around him (about 500 people). The lucky ones can see Beuys, lying on the floor pushing a drawing covered blackboard across the floor with a stick in three stages. After each section he wipes off the figuration and then draws a new one. When he reaches the piano he sits on the floor and meditates, next to the blackboard, with the stick in his arms pointing at the drawing. Suddenly a film begins. First of all "Eurasian Staff", then the performance "Vacuum - Mass" in Cologne and lastly "Trans-Siberian Railway"...

Most of the spectators have left by now. Beuys begins, with the help of the ladder, to collect onto the round tin lid the uncountable bits of an elastic mass (gelatine) which are on the wall. Standing in the middle of the room, Beuys holds the filled tin lid with outstretched arms above his head and tips the content over himself. Then he lifts the blackboard, with a grail drawing on it and holds it above his head like a shield and speaks inarticulate noises into the microphone. He lays the blackboard on the floor and stands behind it, his legs wide apart and a spear like stick in his right hand. He stays in this position for more than half an hour. After this Beuys goes over to the water filled tub. He ties the torches onto his thighs, fills the watering can with water and steps into the tub, where Christiansen pours out the content of the can over him."

(from "Joseph Beuys. Leben und Werk" by Götz Adriani, Karin Thomas and Winfried Konnertz, Cologne: DuMont 1981)

Sweeping up

Production: Jürgen Boettcher, Berlin, 1972

Direction: Jürgen Boettcher

Camera: Horst Behrendorf

Sound: Amato Oberberg

Editing: Hannelore Hoefler

26 minutes, colour, sound
Without speech

Production format: 16 mm

On the 1st of May 1972 was the big May Day procession of the "Opposition Outside Parliament" (part of the student movement), through the Karl-Marx Square in West Berlin. After they had marched by Beuys swept up the square with a red broom. This performance by Beuys went by almost unnoticed by the general public. The swept up residue from this political performance (mostly leaflets) was then filled into plastic bags with "Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum" printed on them. This organization was founded by Beuys.

The film shows first of all the passing demonstration, during which Beuys stands at the side of the road. Two of Beuys' students help him to sweep up the square, an African and an Asian. At the end, the swept up rubbish is emptied out in the rooms of the Block Gallery in Berlin, which organized the performance. A show case containing this rubbish and the red broom remains as a relic of the performance.

Joseph Beuys comments upon this political artistic performance himself: "In this way I wanted to make it clear that the fixed ideological orientation of the demonstrators must also be swept up, that is to say, what is proclaimed on the banners as the Dictatorship of the Proletariate. ...In practical terms: We can find solidarity in what has to be done. Then we don't dispense with coming from the respective ideological direction. If, however, one always pushes the ideological direction into the foreground, then one can never agree upon what has to be done."



I Like America and America Likes Me

Production: René Block
Gallery, New York, 1974/78

Camera: Helmut Wietz
With the cooperation of
Ursula Block, Caroline Tisdall,
Irene von Zahn, Ernst Mitzka

35 minutes, black and white,
sound

Without speech

Production format: 16 mm



In America: King Coyote (FLUXUS Zone West)

Veiled shepherd, stick with curved handle (walking stick, shepherd's crook or blind man's stick? Reminder of Eurasian Staff), coming from the breast region - through the curved handle direction back to Beuys (head region?): outwards - inwards. Awakeness-instrument, alertness-instrument - awareness?, even weapon. Figure is otherwise completely protected from the outside by a blanket (felt): warmth-piece. Coldness outside? Concentrated. The darkness-picture provokes light. An inner uneasiness develops in us: the scent of freedom's secret!! What happens inside the blanket? Nothing can be seen except the rod: energy-carrier in crooked position: "I'll get right in there - that's sure: right in the middle! But I'll have nothing to do with them: (feeble lot). If I'm going to do it, then I'll do it right." Rod: antenna. KING COYOTE. Coyote looks like a BEUYS. Coyote alert. Beuys: in human posture, slightly other than usual. Coyote realizes: he's not trying to get me,

has reduced himself, is therefore really big. Deals with me through the right channel. Contact now made again (quiet - transmission!); communicating with my king. (Coyote: Beuys instrument and vice versa.) Dammit, that's hardly understandable. Can not be proved at all. Coyote thinks: King of the earth, I put my hope in you. I'll go along with that. At last one who can teach me something. Who understands what's going on: FREEDOM-

MAN. Forget the other "great" kings! Hardly noticeable and: run down: the earth: energy crisis. — warmth — truth — freedom — love — mankind — Thinking is kingly.

(Johannes Stüttgen, 1974)

In May 1974 Joseph Beuys lived together with a coyote for one week. The performance took place in the Block Gallery, New York. This Film is an impressive documentation of the mute dialogue between the two.

In memoriam: George Maciunas

Piano Duet with
Nam June Paik

Production: Gallery René
Block, Berlin, 1978

Camera: Gunther Gude

Music: Joseph Beuys,
Nam June Paik

74 minutes, black and white,
sound

Without speech

Production format: video

On the 7th of July 1978 Beuys and Paik gave a piano concert in honour of the late Fluxus pioneer George Maciunas, at a Fluxus soirée in the assembly hall of the Düsseldorf State Art Academy. George Maciunas died at the age of 47, so Beuys and Paik agreed to fix the length of the concert at 74 minutes.

The two pianists sat opposite each other at two grand pianos. To begin, a felt wedge is pushed under Beuys' instrument. He himself carries a rucksack, from which a copper walking stick in a felt roll is sticking out. Another stick is leaning on his piano stool. Both artists improvise, right from the start, whereby changing harmonies occur. Paik often strikes up well known melodies, Beuys plays more freely. The mood of the concert is on the whole peaceful and even and the atmosphere in the crowded hall emanates concentration. The camera, which never changes its view-point, films alternately Paik from a slanting angle behind him and Beuys from a slanting angle in front. It pans slowly back and forth between the two, or it takes in the complete view of the stage.

Paik sings, hums, breaths and blows into the microphone, holds it in the open piano directly over the strings, taps the strings, runs the microphone along them. Vibration and feed-back is heard. Beuys occasionally switches on a tape recorder which renders a squeaky radio like voice and a singsong.

After about 50 minutes the hall lights go out. Paik lights a candle and plays with the lighted candle on the piano keys. The camera is overtaxed by this weak light till slowly the hall lights up again. Shortly before the end of the concert Paik takes an alarm clock in his hand and holds it to the microphone so that a loud ticking is transmitted. He wraps up the microphone and the clock in his jacket and sits still on his stool, for a while, with the bundle, while Beuys carries on playing. After a short time the alarm rings and shows that the concert is over. The pianists stop playing. Applause.

Joseph Beuys - Transformer

Production: I.T.A.P. Pictures
John Halpern, New York,
1988

Direction, script:
John Halpern

Camera: Gerald Saldo,
Barbara Brooks

Music: Michael Galasso
Editing, video effects:
Gary Jevitt

Video conception:
Les Levine

59 minutes, colour, sound
American version,
text list available
Production format: 16 mm
and video



In 1977 the New York sculptor and conceptual artist, John Halpern, made the suggestion of a joint film to Joseph Beuys. A project to promote clear understanding of Beuys' work and theories to an average television public. Two years later Halpern shot about 20 hours of film and video material during the occasion of the large retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum. In 1988 he was at last able to succeed in raising the financial backing required to work on the material, from which the 60 minute video tape "Joseph Beuys - Transformer" was produced.

It is the only comprehensive documentation of the most important Beuys exhibition during his life-time. Halpern observed the artist and his assistants while they were setting up the exhibition and repeatedly carried on long conversations with him during the work.

Halpern assembled Beuys' remarks from the interviews with shots of the objects and installations so that in the video tape the commentary about them, from Beuys himself, is unusually detailed. In this way a complete theoretically consolidated representation of his work is presented at the same time as an authentic portrait of the artist, told in his own words.

John Halpern also purposefully used advanced video techniques to compose an exciting visual adventure through the aesthetic, political and spiritual theories of Joseph Beuys. The stations are taken from what Beuys himself formulated as "Life Course/Work Course". They are in the exhibition, it's catalogue and in the video tape as orientation points in his work.

Joseph Beuys in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam

Production, direction:

Babeth, Amsterdam, 1980/88

Camera:

Johan van der Keuken

Sound: Noshka van der Lely

17 minutes, colour, sound

German version,
text list available

Production format: 16 mm

From November 1979 to January 1980, drawings by Joseph Beuys were shown at an exhibition in the Boymans-van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam. On the occasion of a discussion, an Amsterdam artist and filmmaker, Babeth, filmed a long statement made by Beuys, in which he explains the political and economical dimensions of his widened concept of art.

"When I say: Everyone is an artist, then I address precisely the art that one could call social art; a new discipline within art. But this wider concept of art, in fact, the true concept of art, which relates to every person and to creativity, that means to the ability that exists as free creative power in everyone, must really be called an anthropological art. If it then relates to people's ability, in all fields of work, then the concept relates to people's work itself. ... and so, we are, of course, at home in all places of work within the society with this concept of art, and naturally mainly in those places of work, where the greatest section of people produce, in work collectives, for example, in the industrial field.

Work with social materials does not lead to pictures straight away. It can lead to pictures and it should lead to pictures. To begin, it is work with invisible material, that means work in human relationships, work in human interactions, work in building new ideas and in language - that means people understanding one another, in dialogue; doing all these things in other more flexible materials than those of the fine arts. These other materials are a sort of software within the social sculpture, whereby software really refers to something quite spiritual. This kind of software and this kind of work in social materials, can be carried on after one's death and it can be done before one's birth. I want to say, that here, one is working completely in the form of the invisible sculpture."

Beuys

Production: Werner Nekes, Mülheim/Ruhr, 1981

Direction, script:

Werner Nekes, Dore O.

Camera: Werner Nekes

11 minutes, colour, sound
German version with English
subtitles, text list available
Production format: 16 mm

Beuys, a colour film from Werner Nekes and Dore O., makes do with a minimum of film resources. The film makers have positioned the one to be portrayed in front of a white wall, with his back to the camera, facing a bricked in window which creates a frame around his upper body and a more intense white within it. Beuys, in hat and coat, veiled, and yet penetratingly black in contrast to all that white, formulates, during the 11 minutes of film, his theoretical art maxims, struggling for expression with his hands cramped and folded across his back. Figures viewed from behind invite identification, can be interpreted as a sort of projection of the viewer into the image, beginning to see with the eyes of such a figure. But: what does he see with Beuys' eyes? The window is walled up, there is no view, no perspective. C.D.Friedrich is long dead! What, today, "takes place" in this picture, happens in front of him, in front of the surface, between the viewer and the "canvas" and is really more a sculpture than a picture: a speaking sculpture. The artist himself makes statements as an art object. (Eva M.J.Schmid, 'Magazin R', 6/1981)



"Speech is of course, in any case, the first kind of sculpture. One forms the thoughts in a medium of expression. The medium itself is the speech. One must learn then to view the thoughts themselves - so that people learn to view them as an artist would view his work, that means: for their form, for their proportionality, for their power." (Joseph Beuys)

From here out...

Two interviews with
Joseph Beuys

Production: Art Com,
Munich, 1984/87

Direction, script:

Peter Herrmann

Camera: Benedikt Kuby

Sound: Heidi Pollack

Editing: Margarethe Rose

Interviews: Peter Herrmann,
Jürgen Schilling

23 minutes, colour, sound
German version,
text list available
Production format: video



On the occasion of the exhibition "from here out" which took place in Düsseldorf's trade fair halls in 1984, Peter Herrmann and Jürgen Schilling conducted two conversations with Joseph Beuys. Excerpts from these talks were used in the television report titled "About new German art". In 1987 the original material was put together again, unshortened.

First of all Joseph Beuys is asked how he estimates the "new painting" in Germany and what significance he allots the German art scene in general. He outspokenly criticizes the lack of principle and the passivity which in his opinion has developed among museum people, critics and the public. The unrestricted pluralism leads to a negation of the intrinsic connection between art and the society and also to a susceptibility to fashionable trends. Nevertheless, he regards the German contribution to the international development with optimism; not only in art but also referring to political and general social tendencies and events. It is in this sense that he wants the exhibition's title, originating from him, to be understood: "From here something is going outwards". In the heart of Europe - Germany has a special significance and responsibility as possibly the root to a boundary crossing, human cultural progress.

The Germans should begin their task, ready to serve and without conceited nationalism, as a natural link between east and west. Beuys also explains both his works, shown in the exhibition, "Economy values" and "Fond VII/2" in connection to these global assessments which have become unexpectedly topical since autumn, 1989. The first installation comprises of shelves with basic foods from the G.D.R., positioned opposite paintings from the "Düsseldorf School". Beuys emphasises the common character of the objects as products of human work and creativity, and refers to his widened concept of art. According to Beuys, this innovatory human energy, which is noticable everywhere, can only unfold in freedom. It is the task of art to fight for this.

SOCIAL SCULPTURE

FELT TV

TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY

CELTIC + 

SWEEPING UP

I LIKE AMERICA AND AMERICA LIKES ME

IN MEMORIAM: GEORGE MACIUNAS

JOSEPH BEUYS – TRANSFORMER

BEUYS

FROM HERE OUT...

**JOSEPH BEUYS IN THE BOYMANS- VAN
BEUNINGEN MUSEUM, ROTTERDAM**