

# Dia:



Joseph Beuys  
*7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks)*, inaugurated in 1982 and ongoing  
West 22nd Street between and including 10th and 11th Avenues  
New York, New York

## Joseph Beuys *7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks)*, 1982–

*7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks)* is an international public project by Joseph Beuys, who was born in Düsseldorf in 1921. With major support from Dia Art Foundation and under the auspices of the Free International University (FIU)—an experimental pedagogical organization co-founded by Beuys in Düsseldorf in 1973—the artist initiated *7000 Oaks* in Kassel, West Germany, in 1982, as part of the quinquennial international art exhibition Documenta. Beuys intended for the Kassel initiative to be the first stage in an ongoing project to plant trees throughout the world as part of a global mission to spark environmental and social change, and Dia extended the project to New York in 1988. Located on the same block as Dia Chelsea and the institution's administrative offices, this portion of *7000 Oaks* now consists of 38 living trees, each paired with a columnar basalt marker measuring four feet tall.

In preparation for Documenta 7, Beuys arranged in early 1982 for basalt to be brought into Kassel from a quarry outside the city, which was then amassed on the front lawn of the Fridericianum, Documenta's primary exhibition building. Beuys himself planted the first tree with its accompanying stele. The planting continued over the next five years under the aegis of the FIU. Trees and stones were arranged according to site proposals submitted by residents, neighborhood councils, schools, local associations, and other groups. At the opening of Documenta 8 in June 1987, some 18 months after Beuys died, the artist's son, Wenzel, and widow, Eva, planted the last tree in Kassel, matching the nominal 7,000. While the majority of the trees were oaks, 15 other species were incorporated.

"*7000 Oaks* is a sculpture referring to peoples' lives, to their everyday work," Beuys once said. "That is my concept of art, which I call the extended concept of art or social sculpture."<sup>1</sup> Both notions were crucial to the artist's practice. For Beuys, the "extended concept of art" indicated that any material or action (like planting a tree) could be considered a work of art, while "social sculpture" signified art's capacity to shape new social worlds and forms of collectivity. For the artist, activism, pedagogical endeavors, public actions, and even media appearances could all belong to an artistic practice.

The related issues of ecology and collectivity foregrounded in *7000 Oaks* constitute a recurring thread in Beuys's work. In 1964 the artist made a spade with two handles, *Gemeinschaftsspaten* (Community Spade) for the Fluxus action *24 Stunden* (24 Hours) on June 5, 1965, at Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, West Germany. "Two handles on one spade signify a special kind of compound action for people working the earth together," the artist noted.<sup>2</sup> A decade later, the founding FIU manifesto declared that "it is no longer regarded as romantic but exceedingly realistic to fight for every tree, every plot of undeveloped land, every stream as yet unpoisoned."<sup>3</sup> Those earlier propositions materialized in public actions at the turn of the 1980s. Beuys's Pescara, Italy, project, *Fondazione per la rinascita dell'agricoltura* (Institute for the Rebirth of

Agriculture, 1978), initiated collective tree planting as a specific group of actions based on a concept of agriculture outside science or economic profit.<sup>4</sup> In parallel, Beuys began organizing *7000 Oaks*.

Unlike previous local actions, Beuys always intended *7000 Oaks* to spread around the world. Dia was an early supporter of the project, formalizing a joint venture agreement with the FIU in March 1982 to help fund the piece. In 1987 Dia opened a new exhibition space at 548 West 22nd Street with three simultaneous exhibitions of works by Beuys, Imi Knoebel, and Blinky Palermo. As part of celebrations that unfolded over the course of a year following the new building's inauguration, Dia installed five trees and columns on West 22nd Street, bringing *7000 Oaks* to New York. Per Beuys's original instructions, the basalt was imported from the same quarry that had supplied the Kassel manifestation. *7000 Oaks* was further expanded in 1996 to run the length of the entire block between 10th and 11th Avenues.<sup>5</sup> Coinciding with the renovation of Dia Chelsea in 2020–21, one more pair was added, bringing the total to 38. In keeping with the variety of the Kassel plantings, the species include Callery pear, common hackberry, ginkgo, Japanese pagoda, littleleaf linden, pin oak, sycamore, thornless honey locust, and zelkova—hardy species capable of withstanding the stresses of the urban environment.

*7000 Oaks* is both site-specific and completely transposable, bound to the germination period of trees yet designed to alter future ecologies. Beuys's idealism has carried forth in the broader life of the project. It has inspired similar plantings, official or otherwise, in Baltimore, Minneapolis, Oslo, and Sydney, among other locations, and the Stiftung 7000 Eichen continues to operate in Kassel, where it supports and maintains the project. In times of ecological crisis, it becomes clear that 7,000 is only a nominal limit. As Beuys once said in a typically expansive register: "I believe that planting these oaks is necessary not only in biosphere terms, that is to say, in the context of matter and ecology, but in that it will raise ecological consciousness—raise it increasingly, in the course of the years to come, because we shall never stop planting."<sup>6</sup>

—Matilde Guidelli-Guidi

## Notes

1. Joseph Beuys, quoted in Karl Heinrich Hülbusch and Norbert Scholz, *Joseph Beuys: 7000 Eichen zur documenta 7 in Kassel* (Kassel, West Germany: Kasseler Verlag, 1984), p. 31. Quote translated by Joseph P. Henry.
2. Joseph Beuys, *Joseph Beuys*, ed. Caroline Tisdall (New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1979), p. 204.
3. Joseph Beuys, *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America*, comp. Carin Kuoni (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993), p. 151.
4. Benjamin Dodenhoff, "1979–1983," in *Joseph Beuys: Parallel Processes*, eds. Marion Ackermann and Isabelle Malz (Düsseldorf: Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen; Munich: Schirmel/Mosel, 2010), p. 255.
5. The expansion was completed in partnership with the New York City Department of Parks & Recreation, New York Tree Trust, and Arthur Ross Foundation. Additionally, permits to make changes to the sidewalk were acquired from the city's Department of Transportation, which was also Dia's partner in presenting the project to the city's design review agency, Art Commission, New York. While Dia maintains 7000 Oaks in Chelsea, the work is a long-term loan to the city of New York.
6. Beuys, quoted in *Beschreibung eines Kunstwerkes: Joseph Beuys, 7000 Eichen*, ed. Johannes Stüttgen, trans. Bruni Mayor (Kassel, West Germany: Sander, 1982), p. 1.

## About the artist

Joseph Beuys was born in Krefeld, Germany, in 1921. During World War II, he enlisted in Luftwaffe, the German Air Force, where he earned a military medal after sustaining injuries in a 1942 plane crash and later in the Western Front. Following the war, Beuys trained in sculpture at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, but eventually transitioned away from his monumental, almost expressionist sculptural style to become a key figure in performance, Conceptual, and installation art of the postwar period. Central to his work was his teaching at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where his radical methods and open-enrollment policies led to his infamous dismissal in autumn 1972. In line with his philosophy of an “expanded concept of art,” Beuys’s practice comprised myriad political activities, including co-founding the German Green Party. Beuys’s work has been shown in numerous exhibitions, such as Documenta 4 through 8; the 37th and 39th Venice Biennales; and a retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1979. In addition to the stewardship of *7000 Oaks* as a permanent site, Dia has presented multiple exhibitions of Beuys’s work throughout the years, among them several presentations at Dia Chelsea as well as a long-term display of his work at Dia Beacon (2003–17). Beuys died in Düsseldorf in 1986.

## Further reading

Beuys, Joseph. *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America*. Compiled by Carin Kuoni. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1993.

Cooke, Lynne, and Karen Kelly, eds. *Joseph Beuys: Drawings After the Codices Madrid of Leonardo da Vinci*. New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1998.

Mesch, Claudia, and Viola Michely, eds. *Joseph Beuys: The Reader*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.

Scholz, Norbert. “Joseph Beuys: 7000 Eichen in Kassel = 7000 chênes à Kassel = 7000 Oaks in Kassel.” *Anthos: Zeitschrift für Landschaftsarchitektur*, September 1986, pp. 31–35.

Tisdall, Caroline, ed. *Joseph Beuys*. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1979.

## Checklist

### **7000 Eichen (7000 Oaks), 1982–**

Trees and basalt

Courtesy Dia Art Foundation

Dia Art Foundation is committed to advancing, realizing, and preserving the vision of artists. Dia Beacon in the Hudson Valley presents Dia's collection of art from the 1960s to the present as well as special exhibitions, new commissions, and public programs. Dia Chelsea in New York presents temporary exhibitions, new commissions, performances, lectures, and readings. Dia also maintains several long-term sites, including Walter De Maria's *The New York Earth Room* (1977) and *The Broken Kilometer* (1979), Max Neuhaus's *Times Square* (1977), Joseph Beuys's *7000 Eichen* (*7000 Oaks*, which was inaugurated at Documenta 7 in 1982), all of which are located in New York; Dia Bridgehampton, the Dan Flavin Art Institute (established in 1983), on Long Island, New York; De Maria's *The Lightning Field* (1977) in western New Mexico; Nancy Holt's *Sun Tunnels* (1973–76) in the Great Basin Desert and Robert Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970) in Great Salt Lake, Utah; Cameron Rowland's *Depreciation* (2018); and De Maria's *The Vertical Earth Kilometer* (1977) in Kassel, Germany.

### **Dia Beacon**

Riggio Galleries  
3 Beekman Street  
Beacon, New York

### **Dia Chelsea**

537 West 22nd Street  
New York, New York

### **Dia Bridgehampton**

The Dan Flavin Art Institute  
23 Corwith Avenue  
Bridgehampton, New York

Cover: Joseph Beuys, *7000 Eichen* (*7000 Oaks*) (detail), West 22nd Street between and including 10th and 11th Avenues, New York, 1982–. Long-term installation. © Joseph Beuys/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn. Photo: Bill Jacobson Studio, New York