Selected Bibliography:


Joseph Beuys was born in Kleve, Germany, on May 12, 1921, where he grew up. Trained at the Kunstakademie in Düsseldorf, he taught there as a professor of sculpture from 1961 until his controversial dismissal in 1972. In 1951 the van der Grinten Collection of Beuys’ sculpture and drawing was first exhibited. In the early sixties he became involved with Fluxus, taking part in a number of concerts as well as devising his own “actions” which soon became his principal aesthetic mode. In 1970 a large collection of his work formed under the artist’s own aegis, the Stroher Collection, was installed in the Hessischen Landesmuseum in Darmstadt where it remains not only the single most important public collection of his work but retains the format he devised. Joseph Beuys died in Düsseldorf on January 21, 1986.

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A book with full documentation of Arena—where would I have got if I had been intelligent! 1970-72 Collection of Dia Center for the Arts, New York. is forthcoming.

Site Map

A series of 100 panels containing photographs

stacks and oil can

Arena, 1970-72

Collection of Dia Center for the Arts, New York.

JOSEPH BEUYS


January 23, 1992 - May 1993
548 West 22nd Street New York City
The photographs assembled in these panels include multiple shots of some of the more important of Beuys' former actions and concerts woven across a number of panels, reinforcing the circular and continuous (as distinct from linear or evanescent) nature of his thinking and activity. Choosing the medium of photography, which captures a moment forever lost, and thus a trace of what was in themselves in many instances ephemeral events, Beuys then manipulates the print in ways that draw attention to its function as a reproductive medium that, in bearing witness, necessarily interprets and interprets selectively. Many negatives have been bleached, solarized or otherwise manipulated, while the rough printing, reminiscent of an arte povera aesthetic, is coupled with casually torn edges, and the maintenance of the perforations and numbers from the original film strip. Most of the surfaces of the prints are also overworked: often a layer of wax has been added, in some cases fat and a material much favored by Beuys, braunkreuz, have also been applied. For Beuys, materials carried a symbolic resonance within his overall conception of a "social sculpture"; for example, fat and felt were employed repeatedly because they were good insulators, copper was favored as a conductor of energy, iron as a material suggestive of a rootedness to the earth. Drawing on the anthroposophical writings of Rudolph Steiner and on the Fluxus postulate that the interchange of energies is the principal form of art communication Beuys developed a complex idealistic vision in which the role of the artist is akin to that of a shaman and art means to a social utopia.

Alongside the photographic images in Arena Beuys added three monochrome panels which were for him, Caroline Tisdall contends, redolent of "blue sky for the cold clarity of the north...[and] the warm yellow of sulphur and southern sun." A single found photograph, depicting the Roman theatre at Verona, speaks to his overriding conception of the work as dealing with the "arena of life." As finally realized in 1973 Arena has a monumental scale and grand design appropriate to an artistic summation.