

Exhibiting Beuys



Installation view of the re-installation of Joseph Beuys' Palazzo Regale (1986) in the exhibition Joseph Beuys. Parallelprozesse at Grabbe Halle, K20, Düsseldorf in 2010. The work was originally installed in a space bordered by mobile walls that were produced for the exhibition Vesuvius by Andy Warhol at Museo di Capodimonte in 1985. Armin Zweite transferred Palazzo Regale to K20 Düsseldorf in 1991, where it was constantly presented in the collection.

How do museum exhibitions deal with site specific installations originally developed for different spaces? What strategies can be applied to exhibiting such works and to what extent does installing them anew change them? **Exhibiting Beuys?**, a series of talks held at K20 Düsseldorf was organized in cooperation with the HfG Karlsruhe a year prior to the exhibition **Joseph Beuys. Parallelprozesse** (2010). The lectures analysed the role of the museum and curatorial approaches to representations of installations and discussed possible methods of presenting site-specific installation works under changed conditions. Joseph Beuys was aware of the fact that once a piece enters a museum, how it is exhibited cannot be controlled completely. Although artists can set the conditions for how they want their work to be displayed, Beuys decided a work's transfer into the museum space is also to be understood as a transfer of responsibility, leading to questions about its presentation. Beuys used materials that are subject to disintegration and adapted installation works in reaction to different exhibition spaces. **THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY** (1983) was installed anew by Beuys at Haus der Kunst in Munich in 1984. In 2002 the installation was re-installed at Pinakothek der Moderne Munich's. Using precise measurements, a formally accurate presentation was transferred into another space. Analyzing such processes, one not only eventually questions how exhibition makers take on their role of becoming actively involved in the techniques of installation, but also to what extent spaces should be developed for pieces that were originally created in reaction to a given space.

Exhibition as Art

Beuys used space as his material and actively worked with it. His sculptures were created not in isolation, but in relation to contexts, reacting to them and actively altering them. While the concepts for some of his pieces can be captured in sketches or photographs, his sculptural work can only be experienced in the context of the exhibition, which is created by the act of installation. Reception of the work depends not on the individual objects, but on an inquiry into the relationships and spatial constellations of the materials used. With the vitrine, moreover, there emerges a type of artwork that displays objects in an environment perceived as a space within the space of the exhibition as a whole. As with the vitrines he used, Beuys did little to change or design his exhibition spaces, instead taking existing conditions as a starting point for his pieces, integrating them, making use of them and contextually reacting to them.

The places where Beuys showed his work are, in many cases, not so much enclosures as raw material, the stuff from which he created the exhibition as a work of art. Seen in this way, the exhibition environment cannot be entirely separated from the finished work and becomes, in a way, part of it. On the other hand, Beuys did transfer and transport his works, moving them from place to place and situating them in new spatial relationships, in the process reconstructing them and, through the specifics of each situation, changing them. We may thus conclude that, while the installations consist of an unchanging ensemble of objects, they do not constitute a fixed and invariable spatial structure. By installing the object ensemble differently each time, in specific relation to

concrete spatial conditions, Beuys made space his sculptural material.

Works such as **THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY** whose location changed from the Aldo van Eyck–designed Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf to Munich’s Haus der Kunst, or **SHOW YOUR WOUND** (1974/75), relocated from a pedestrian underpass to an installation in the Lenbachhaus, were completely reconfigured by Beuys for the second venue.

Beuys’s sketches for **THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY** illustrate possibilities that would take definite shape only through engagement with a given space. The fact that such a manifestation is not the only conceivable form, and that Beuys always gave specific consideration to the exhibition space, is evident in the ways the installation was translated to Düsseldorf’s Galerie Schmela and the Haus der Kunst in Munich. In 1984, Beuys relocated **THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY** to the Haus der Kunst, setting up the installation of forty-four basalt stones in the last room of a gallery accessible only from the other end. In this setting, the individual elements of the installation were not so much lined up as strewn about the space. Yet, in terms of access and presentation, the situation still resembled the original installation Beuys had created for Van Eyck’s architecture in 1983: In Munich, the piece was installed behind two barriers set up by the museum and cordoned off from visitors. Thus, much as it had been at Galerie Schmela, the piece was viewed from an external perspective.

The installation **SHOW YOUR WOUND** was installed in 1976, in collaboration with Galerie Schellmann & Klüser, as an environment in a large space in the Maximilianstraße pedestrian underpass. This original version is preserved only in Ute Klophaus’s photographs. Beuys’s

installation at the Lenbachhaus in 1980 compressed the five twinned objects into a smaller space, compared to the first installation, thereby defining an entirely different experience of the piece, although the sequence of elements along the wall was identical.

Exhibition as Curation

Today, more than two decades since the last installation realized by Beuys himself, not only are we left with a history of spaces created by the artist, we can also look back on a history of Beuys spaces post-Beuys. Many pieces have subsequently been exhibited by curators in the context of museums and thus spatially modified. Though Beuys’s original installation (or in some cases, the last spatial situation he created) forms the basis for all posthumous exhibitions, our perception of the works is shaped by our experiences in new exhibition contexts and spatial constellations. As early as 1975, Beuys commented in a conversation with Frans Haks on the way his pieces evolved in the museum:

HAKS But in a museum there’s a specific context. Suppose that some of your pieces, for example, are in a traditional museum, and maybe someone just puts a tasteful frame around them, obscuring the actual point.

BEUYS That’s right. Of course that could happen quite easily.

HAKS But don’t you have specific conditions on the museum’s role as transmitter; something like: If you buy or show something by me, then I want the information to be presented in such and such a way, to prevent mistakes?

BEUYS I can’t do that. If I were to set conditions like that, then my whole life would be taken up with monitoring whether the museum was actually doing it. No, what I do is radically opposite. I say: Here, you have the thing, and now you can do what you want with it. You can abuse it, do this or that with it; I’m no longer involved. So once I’ve given a piece away, it’s gone.

Mindful of the problem of loss of control and the resulting potential for changes to an exhibition’s form, Beuys states that he cannot give guidelines for proper presentation: Not only is it impossible to control the form of a given exhibition, but such precision, against the backdrop of context-specific adaptations, is not even desirable. Beuys’s belief in not getting involved in the way museums handle his pieces can be read as a comment on the preservation of his work. Potential misunderstandings, and the problem of a tasteful framing that places easy consumability above attentive reception, can be part of the museumization of what is exhibited. In discarding and giving away the objects, Beuys thus obliges us to carefully consider the form and content of the way he himself arranged his works, and of his installations in posthumous exhibitions.

In this context, it seems that contemporary exhibitions cannot be so much about reconstructing Beuys’s spaces as about attempting to update them in order to give them a presence, understood as a spatio-temporal presentness, under changed conditions. This does not, however, rule out questions of reconstruction; rather, it points to the need to decide, case by case and with an eye to the specific situation, how to exhibit a Beuys space. The goal of maximally authentic reproduction opens out between the two poles of formally and conceptually radical interpretation. The formal side can be seen in the reinstallation of **THE END OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY** at Munich’s Pinakothek der Moderne in 2002, which, using precise measurements of the stones’ positions in relation to one another, sets up a one-to-one geometric correspondence to the final installation by Beuys at the Haus der Kunst. The contradiction between this and the simultaneous loss of spatial

relations, surface materials and lighting conditions in the transfer from one museum to another is not resolved, nor is it addressed. On the other side, a conceptually oriented interpretation can be seen in exhibitions like the 2008 Beuys retrospective **WE ARE THE REVOLUTION** at the Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. Here, the precision of the formal translation is accorded as little significance as the spatial aspect of the installation, since the surviving objects are regarded primarily as relics of actions whose contemporary relevance is viewed in sociopolitical and ideological terms. Between these two poles, however, there are more interesting ways of bringing Beuys up to date. Until now, these have found expression chiefly in Armin Zweite's 1991 exhibition in Düsseldorf, **Joseph Beuys: Nature Material Form**, and Harald Szeemann's 1993 retrospective **Joseph Beuys** at the Kunsthaus Zürich. These are the exhibitions to build upon today.

Update 2010. Joseph Beuys. Parallel Processes

The 2010 exhibition **Joseph Beuys: Parallel Processes**, in Düsseldorf, comprises three spaces. The three parts of the exhibition, in the Klee Halle, Henkel Gallerie and Grabbe Halle, differ in curatorial approach and exhibition strategy. They can be read both independently and in conjunction with one another, as a course to be followed or as a constellation. Each of the galleries develops a separate theme.

Two of the galleries, the Klee Halle and the Henkel Gallerie, can be read, on one hand, as the first and second halves of the artist's career; though on the other, each reflects a different exhibitory logic at work in the process of museumization. Whereas the first gallery presents primarily drawings and sculptural works in a structured, rhythmic sequence of rooms; in the second, viewers

encounter a huge hall containing an ensemble of various sculptures. The light changes accordingly, from the first gallery's minimal lighting, calibrated for works on paper, with highlights on individual pieces, to the second gallery's bright, space-accentuating, overall illumination with overhead daylight.

Through contextualizing presentation, the drawings, sculptures and installations in the Klee Halle are structured as a sequence of narrations. The relationships among the complexes of works on display, the formal and conceptual ties, are reflected in the exhibition architecture, which uses temporary walls to partition the open space of the hall. The architectural structure unites two modes of exhibition: In the enclosed space of the rooms, the profusion of objects on display encourages close examination, while in the open areas, sightlines and spatial relationships underscore conceptual connections.

The installations and objects shown in the Henkel Gallerie form open constellations that invite viewers to work out connections within this archipelago-like expanse of objects. This approach to exhibition is in line with Beuys's formulation of the idea of discarding what were once performative installations, and it reflects the way museums collect, preserve and present objects. The installation practice assayed here seeks not to find authenticity in an emulation of Beuys's exhibition practice, but to create a installation-like situation of museumized objects placed in relationships that are as open as they are formally precise. In addition, this form of presentation recalls Harald Szeemann's landscape-like installations in the main room of his 1993 exhibition **Joseph Beuys** in Zurich. Although that exhibition was also installed in multiple spaces at the Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris,

the presentation of the large sculptures as an open landscape dominated the show's photographic documentation and thus its subsequent reception. This move toward a posthumous installation practice not only reflects the aspect of the museumized, artistically discarded object, but also highlights the curatorial history of past installations and their significance for our current understanding of Beuys.

The third exhibition space occupies a special position, departing from the chronology of works to bring together three pieces, each of which constitutes a space of its own. These are space installations, which had always been exhibited as such in museums, even though they had originally appeared in other contexts in site-specific installations by Beuys. Here, in contrast with the works on paper and the sculptural pieces in the first two galleries, the spatial aspect comes to the fore, so that the walls themselves become part of the installation. Unlike the presentation of sculptures and vitrines—which relies on completed, authentic pieces—the re-exhibition of installations calls for forms of reconstruction that enable viewers to experience the thing being shown as a space.

Kinesthesia

What criteria does an update follow? The architecture of this exhibition is not based on the visual reproduction of an exemplary model; it does not copy the proportions and surfaces of an original space in an attempt to reconstruct a situation Beuys created in some other location. The starting point for an update is, first, a perception, which arises through movement in space. In the approach, the path to the installation, when moving into the room, and in the installation itself, the viewer participates in the production of the space. Therefore, this reconstruction first

follows the movement patterns of the original installation, recreating the space beginning with its visitors. Forms of movement are generated by entering in the middle or from the side, by moving and turning in space, as well as by thresholds. Both the artistic genesis and the curatorial exhibition history of these Beuys spaces are reflected, in equal measure, by the exhibit's kinesthetic positioning of installations such as: **SHOW YOUR WOUND** (1974–75), **PALAZZO REGALE** (1985) and **LIGHTNING WITH STAG IN ITS GLARE** (1958–85), as well as **THE PACK** (1969), **STRIPES FROM THE HOUSE OF THE SHAMAN 1964–72** (1980) and **BEFORE LEAVING CAMP I** (1979–80).

The installation **STRIPES FROM THE HOUSE OF THE SHAMAN 1964–72**, in its latest presentation, conforms to the spatial relationships between viewer movement and objects that had evolved in previous exhibition situations. The first complete installation, at the Anthony d'Offay Gallery in London in 1980, was supplemented with additional materials in its first reconstruction in Canberra in 1982, with Beuys attaching the strips of felt to wooden slats rather than the surrounding architecture. Whereas in London, the sealskin and felt coats had been hung on the left, as seen by the viewer; in Canberra, Beuys installed them on the right. If we compare photographs of the two installations Beuys constructed, we notice that the relationships of the elements to each other, and to the viewer's path and line of vision, are identical, but that the installations as a whole (which viewers cannot enter) are mirror images. It becomes apparent that the installation of the elements is oriented toward the viewer's line of vision, and, further, that the attachment of the felt strips to the wooden support, together with the coats, constitutes an unchanging sculptural formation. Beuys's transformation of an in

situ work into a museum installation not only establishes the structure of the piece but also determines the way it is incorporated into the trajectory of the exhibition.

The installation **PALAZZO REGALE** does not match the original measurements of the space where it was created in 1985, at the Museo di Capodimonte in Naples. In this divergence from the original, it resembles Armin Zweite's installation of the piece at the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein Westfalen am Grabbeplatz. Unlike that incarnation, however, the 2010 update adheres to Beuys's original kinesthetic concept by emphasizing the approach along a central axis from a large entrance hall, though without the Capodimonte's ascending staircase. The installation is positioned as a space within the space of the Grabbe Halle, recasting the low entryway in the corridor leading to the main room as a portal situation. Thus the white plaster walls become part of the installation, echoing the white plaster walls that Beuys found left over from the previous exhibition in Naples and reused. In their relationship to the high ceiling and eye-catching stone floor, the walls and vitrines as currently positioned also correspond to the Naples show, without literally reconstructing it. Rather, they draw a connection, provisional and consistent with past developments, to the existing spatial characteristics of this station.

The article was edited by Samuel Korn in collaboration with Wilfried Kuehn. It is a comprehensive extension of an earlier version by Wilfried Kuehn that was previously published in German and English in the exhibition catalogue Joseph Beuys. *Parallelprozesse: Katalog zur Ausstellung der Kunstsammlung NRW*, Verlag Schirmer/Mosel, Munich.



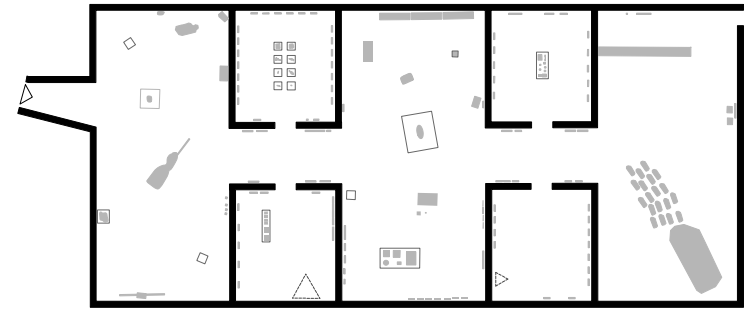
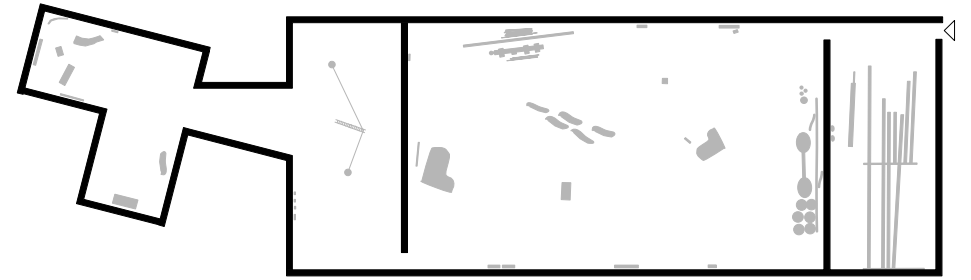
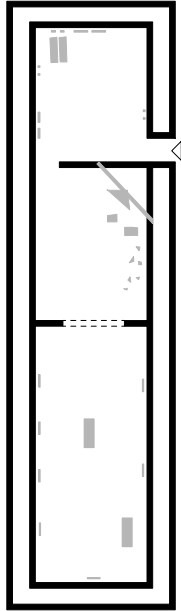
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01 Installation view of the re-installation of Joseph Beuys's *Zeige Deine Wunde* (1974-1975) in the exhibition *Joseph Beuys. Parallelprozesse* at K20 Düsseldorf in 2010. In 1976, Joseph Beuys exhibited the work in a wide open space and then adjusted the installation for a space at Lenbachhaus, Munich in 1980. The re-installation in Düsseldorf was arranged by Helmut Friedel, Director and Curator at Lenbachhaus within the given exhibition architecture's space.



02

02 Installation view of the re-installation of Joseph Beuys's *Zeige Deine Wunde* (1974-1975) in the exhibition *Joseph Beuys. Parallelprozesse* at K20 Düsseldorf



03

03 From top left in clockwise order: Floor plans of the exhibition architecture in Henkel Galerie, Klee Halle, Grabbe Halle during the exhibition Joseph Beuys. Parallelprozesse at K20 Düsseldorf, 2010



03

03 Installation view of Joseph Beuys's Stripes From The House Of The Shaman 1964-72 (1980) in the exhibition Joseph Beuys. Parallelprozesse at K20, Düsseldorf in 2010. Joseph Beuys changed the work's appearance when the Australian National Gallery in Canberra bought it from the Anthony d'Offay Gallery, London in 1981. During the installation process in Canberra in 1982, Joseph Beuys changed the viewing direction when he hung the coats from the left to the right side of the installation and attached the felt stripes laterally reversed in comparison to the earlier presentation.