

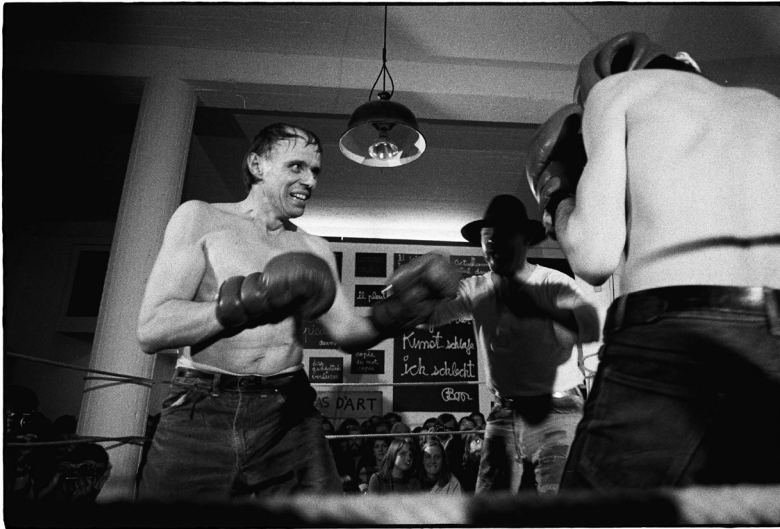
WADDINGTON CUSTOT

Press Release

Joseph Beuys

Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie

7 July–9 September 2017



Waddington Custot is pleased to present an exhibition which puts in context Joseph Beuys' 1972 sculpture 'Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie' (Boxing Match for Direct Democracy). The large, horizontal vitrine houses the two original pairs of boxing gloves, protective helmet and the boxing ring ropes from Beuys' conceptual 'farewell action' at *documenta 5*, a boxing match, between Joseph Beuys (1921–1986) and Abraham David Christian (b.1952). This work will be exhibited in conjunction with the debut UK presentation of the re-mastered archive footage of the boxing match.

For the one hundred days of *documenta 5* in Kassel, from 30 June to 8 October 1972, Beuys established an 'Office for The Organisation for Direct Democracy', which he manned each day and where he vigorously debated his ideas on social reform. The project was based on Beuys' 1971 'Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung (freie Volksinitiative e.V.)' (The Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendum (Free People's Initiative Association)) which, drawing on the theories of philosopher and social reformer, Rudolf Steiner, advocated increased political power for the individual and the goals of cultural freedom and equality. The topics of discussion at the Office were wide-ranging; including educational reform, religion, race relations, women's rights, atomic energy, economics and the Eastern bloc. Beuys saw this act as an infiltration of the art system in order to shift its prescribed dialogues in other directions.

On 8 October, the final day of *documenta 5*, Beuys staged 'Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie' with Abraham David Christian, a Kassel art student. Christian had challenged Beuys to the fight and stood for 'representative government' versus Beuys' 'direct democracy'. The 'Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie' took place at the Museum Fridericianum, against a backdrop of Ben Vautier's 'Thinking Room' and with a rowdy crowd of spectators in attendance. Beuys' student, Anatol Herzfeld, refereed three rounds, after which he declared Beuys the winner, "on points for direct democracy through direct hits."



The exhibition will feature contemporary documentation lent by the Joseph Beuys archive at the Museum Schloss Moyland, original photographs by Hans Albrecht Luszkat and posters and other paraphernalia related to Beuys' participation at *documenta 5*.

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NOTES TO THE EDITORS

Joseph Beuys (b. 1921, Krefeld, Germany; d. 1986, Dusseldorf, Germany) studied sculpture at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf. During World War II, Beuys volunteered for the German air force. In 1944, after his plane crashed in Crimea, he fashioned a myth that he was rescued by Tatars, smeared in fat and wrapped in felt. Thus began the self-promulgating 'myth' of Joseph Beuys.

Beuys' first solo show was held at the van der Grinten farm, Kranenburg, in 1953. Beuys was appointed Professor of Monumental Sculpture at the Dusseldorf Academy of Art in 1961 and participated in *documenta* for the first time in 1964. The following year, he had his first gallery show at Galerie Schmela, Dusseldorf. He would continue to participate in *documenta* in 1968, 1972, 1977 and 1982. Beuys formulated the theory of "social sculpture" which empowered art with the ability to shape society, to which each individual could contribute, as expressed in his oft-quoted maxim, 'Everyone is an artist'.

In response to the shooting of a student during a demonstration protesting the visit of the Shah of Persia in 1967, Beuys founded the German Student Party. This represented his first move into politics. Beuys went on to establish several organisations, including the 'Organisation of Non-Voters' (1970), 'Organisation for Direct

Democracy through Referendum' (1971) and the 'Committee for a Free University' (1971). In 1972, Beuys was dismissed without notice from the Dusseldorf Academy of Art, but he continued to teach, fusing pedagogy into his artistic practice, and to participate in politics, running as the Green Party candidate for both European and federal parliamentary elections.

In 1975, he was awarded an honorary doctorate from Nova Scotia College of Art, Halifax, Canada, and in 1978 he became a member of the Akademie der Kunst, Berlin. Beuys had numerous exhibitions throughout the 1970s, including a major retrospective at the Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York, in 1979. In January 1986, the artist received the Wilhelm Lehmbruck Prize in Duisburg.

Beuys' work has been exhibited worldwide and features in several private and public collections including the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, DC; Museum of Modern Art, New York. Recent museum exhibitions include Tate Modern, London, 2015–16; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, 2016; and an exhibition of drawings at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh, 2016.

Title: Joseph Beuys: Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie
Address: Waddington Custot, 11 Cork Street, London W1S 3LT
Dates: 7 July–11 August 2017
Private View: Thursday 6 July, 6–8pm
Opening Hours: Monday to Friday, 10am to 6pm,
Saturday: 10am to 4pm
Admission: Free
Travel: Piccadilly, Green Park or Bond Street Tube Station

IMAGE 1
'Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie' at *documenta 5*
photographed by Hans Albrecht Luszkat, 1972

IMAGE 2
Joseph Beuys, 'Boxkampf für die direkte Demokratie' 1972,
mixed media in tin and glass vitrine, 15 3/4 x 202 3/4 x 12 in
/ 40 x 515 x 30.5 cm

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