

At the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art – Joseph Beuys



A major new ARTIST ROOMS exhibition devoted to the drawings of the German artist Joseph Beuys will be a highlight of the summer programme at the National Galleries of Scotland this year. It opens tomorrow 30 July 2016.

The exhibition at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art will bring together, for the first time, the extraordinary group of over 110 drawings by Beuys held in the ARTIST ROOMS collection. Put together with great care and knowledge over many years by Anthony d'Offay, the drawings cover the whole of the artist's career from 1945 to the end of his life, reflecting his encyclopaedic interest in nature, science, philosophy, mythology, society, politics and religion. This is the largest and most important collection outside Germany by this key figure of post-war art.



Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) is perhaps best known for his 'Actions', installations and sculpture, but first and foremost he was an artist who was interested in ideas: ideas about how the world, both natural and social, functioned and how the latter could be improved. Beuys expressed these ideas most readily in his drawings. For him drawing was a form of thinking or, as he put it, 'thinking is form'. He produced thousands of drawings, capturing some of his ideas fleetingly, as they were born and developed, but also refining others in carefully considered and composed detail. Together they constitute a crucial insight into how he saw the world.

Beuys lived through a period of unparalleled horror and barbarity and, as member of the Luftwaffe, shot down in the Second World War, was himself confronted with some of its realities. This led to a period of existential crisis after the war and to a determination to use his art to heal some of the deep wounds inflicted on society. The drawings he made in the late 1940s and 1950s are more traditional in form, approach and subject matter, almost Symbolist in feeling, but already in them Beuys began to formulate a coherent view of the world, which would eventually turn into his celebrated theory of sculpture. This proposed a movement between dynamic chaos and rigid form, between warm and cold, intuition and reason.



The ARTIST ROOMS Collection includes famous examples of early drawings of women. For Beuys, women were figures of strength, who represented the dynamic principle and were more attuned than men to natural processes. Men, on the other hand, tended to be ruled by their rational minds and were more rigid in the way they behaved. But it was animals, above all, that held a special place in Beuys's cast of characters, especially hares, stags, swans and bees. They were the very embodiment of natural laws and processes and Beuys used them in his work to represent various shamanistic ideas. For example, the hare was connected with the female principle and was in close touch with the earth, while the stag was connected with the male principle and, following ancient lore, accompanied the human soul on its journey in the afterlife. The ARTIST ROOMS collection has important drawings featuring these animals: the hare in *Clan* 1958 and the stag in *Brightly-Lit Stag Chair* 1957-71.

In the early 1960s Beuys began a new series of works on paper that were monumental, abstract and closely related to painting and even to sculpture. The *Braunkreuz* (or *Brown Cross*) works are so-called because they use a very specific type of red-

brown paint, common in Germany to paint and protect floors. Reminiscent of rust or dried blood, the paint came to be seen, alongside felt and fat, as synonymous with Beuys. In its very ordinariness and earthy materiality, Beuys wanted to suggest a spiritual dimension. The use of the word 'cross' betrays a Christian aspect, often overlooked in Beuys's work. The ARTIST ROOMS collection has one of the finest groups of *Braunkreuz* works in existence and will form a highlight in this exhibition.

In the second part of Beuys's career, as the artist devoted more time to his 'Actions', he also became more socially and politically active. He developed his concept of 'social sculpture', where, instead of actual materials and objects, he used lectures and debates to bring about social change through democratic discussions with those that came to see and hear him. These developments are reflected in Beuys's drawings of the period: first of all in the 'scores' he wrote for several of his 'Actions' and then in his famous blackboard drawings and related works on paper, in which he explained his social and political ideas.

All the stages of Beuys's development as an artist and all the aspects of his world view are represented in the drawings to be shown in this exhibition. Not only will this be the first time that these drawings will be shown together since they became part of the ARTIST ROOMS Collection, but this will be the first major show in the UK of Beuys drawings since 1983. To coincide with the exhibition at Modern Two, there will be a separate display devoted to the extraordinary collaboration between Beuys and the Edinburgh-born artist and gallerist Richard Demarco, which began with Beuys's inclusion in the ground-breaking exhibition *Strategy Get Arts*, held at Edinburgh College of Art in 1970.

ARTIST ROOMS

Joseph Beuys – A Language of Drawing

30 July – 23 October 2016

SCOTTISH NATIONAL GALLERY OF MODERN ART (Modern Two)

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