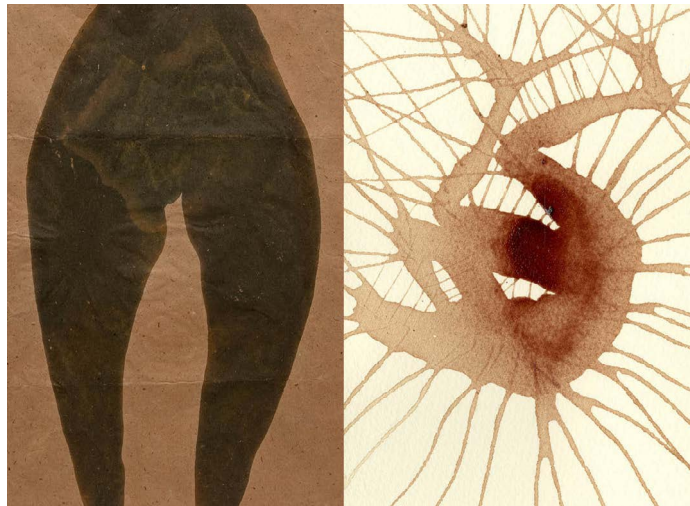


SENSE: Beuys / Gormley

A conversation through drawing

19 January—22 March 2023
Opening Wednesday 18 January 2023, 6—8pm

Thaddaeus Ropac
London Ely House
37 Dover Street, London, W1S 4NJ



LEFT: Joseph Beuys, *Untitled*, 1954. Watercolour on brown paper. 35 x 24.5 cm (13.77 x 9.64 in). © Joseph Beuys Estate / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn, 2023. RIGHT: Antony Gormley, *20TH BLOOD FIELD I*, 2021. Blood on paper. 19 x 14 cm (7.48 x 5.51 in). © the artist

Beuys and I found in drawing a fertile ground, which runs parallel to those actions that we have found necessary to make on and with the world.

— Antony Gormley, 2022

Curated by Antony Gormley, this exhibition in the Chapel Gallery at Thaddaeus Ropac London places the artist's drawings in conversation with those by the prominent post-war artist, Joseph Beuys. Spanning three decades, from the 1950s to the mid-1970s, the selection of Beuys's drawings illuminates the strong relationship that Gormley has developed with the German artist's work. The presentation of Gormley's own drawings, which date from 1984 to 2021, further highlights the two artists' shared ground. What emerges is a joint interest in reconceptualising human relations with the natural world, social networks and the built environment.

Gormley describes Beuys as 'somebody who is trying to think very clearly about repositioning the human being within wider systems of exchange and transformation.' He is drawn to the 'works that disperse the idea of the body' so that it is not 'defined by its appearance or its bounding condition, but is investigated as a zone of transformation.' In his own drawings, Gormley also visualises a conceptualisation of the extended body through his use of unconventional mediums. Deer blood and casein generate fluid corporeal forms that disperse across the page, asserting the resonant potential of his materials (another preoccupation shared with Beuys).

Beuys experienced the physical process of drawing as an essential means through which to crystallise his thoughts. In turn, Gormley describes 'the act of drawing as a form of tuning.' For him, as for Beuys, it

is conceived as ‘a necessary daily activity in which thought is made physical and grounded.’ This dual presentation asserts the fundamental role of drawing in both artists’ practices, even while the distinct personal, temporal and geographical contexts in which they worked open up generative spaces of difference.

SENSE: Beuys / Gormley is on view concurrently with *Joseph Beuys: 40 Years of Drawing*, an exhibition of 100 works from the Joseph Beuys family dating from the 1940s to the 1980s, which are shown for the first time in the UK.

Beuys / Gormley: Artist’s statement

The quality of Beuys’s drawings is so varied and so open that they have always intrigued, inspired and involved me in their exploration of material, their antenna-like tracing and the way that, in them, the analytical and emblematic coexist with the elemental.

I have always loved the sense that the line in Beuys’s best drawings is like that of a Ouija board in the hand of a Sensitive, summoning from the ether intuitions about the relationship of the creaturely with the geological. There are many examples of this in the wonderful series of drawings from the Joseph Beuys family that are being shown at Thaddaeus Ropac in the concurrent exhibition, *Joseph Beuys: 40 Years of Drawing*.

Here, in the intimate Chapel Gallery, I hold a conversation with Beuys as I place a number of his drawings alongside my own. The drawings I am most intrigued by are three of the four *Bewegung Rhythmus (Movement Rhythm)* works from 1962. Looking at them, it is as if Beuys has absorbed those pages of Paul Klee’s *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, in which he encourages the artist not to be blinded by the appearance of things but to look at the active principles at work in a system. Here, Beuys via Klee suggests that all phenomena are in the process of becoming and that the artist should record the relationship between active, medial and passive zones.

We see in *Bewegung Rhythmus A* the reconciliation of the body as an energy processing organism with a spatial context. The *Ecke* (*corner*) – that point at which the geometric condition of our habitat is most concentrated (and the corner Beuys later healed with fat in his sculptural practice) – is here found side-by-side with a diagnostic diagram of the alimentary tract. The vertical, downward flow from the sucking, seeking, tasting, speaking tongue, eating mouth and the smelling cranium passes through a compressed body to the heart, and continues down to the genitals: a *bewegung* (*movement*) that is intercepted by a lateral flow of energy that passes from the left ‘receiving’ hand, crosses between the hemispheres of the brain, and passes to the right hand: the hand of making and inscription which holds a tool of measuring and marking.

In *Bewegung Rhythmus C*, the vertical downward flow from the cerebellum is even clearer (but more complex), passing through the cranium and many of the internal organs. The alimentary tract is liberated from the body altogether and, after passing round the cranium, it meanders around the outside of the body as if liberated from its digestive function to become an ectoplasmic extension.

In this drawing, the body itself seems to have grown out of the ground, or seems to be experimenting with a pseudopodic extension on one side (which never actually terminates in a foot) and a branching mycelium on the other. It is as if Beuys is attempting to rethink the location of consciousness within a wider organic realm that reconciles the botanic with the animal.

Beuys’s references to the analytical disciplines of botany and biology evoke his origins as a scientist before he came upon the work of Wilhelm Lehmbruck and decided to become an artist. These drawings infer the function of a diagram but actually make personalised interpretations of the textbook illustrations that may have been familiar from his early scientific studies.

In a delicate and simple way, *Bewegung Rhythmus D* visualises three Cartesian coordinates – axes that

mark a point in space according to the principles of Euclidean geometry – as a six-pointed star. Beuys often drew Cartesian coordinates as two lateral and one vertical axes, expressed as planes, to create the corner he recognised as the determining factor of our habitat (and an inevitable point at which we become stuck). *Bewegung Rhythmus D* echoes two simple renders of this same corner depicted in *Bewegung Rhythmus A*; the first indicating the location of the corner within the coordinates of our habitat, and the other suggesting the possibility of escape from the fate of being ‘cornered’ through Beuys’s extension of the third axis. The six-pointed star in *Bewegung Rhythmus D* holds within it the same famous and terrifying *Ecke*, although it has been freed into space.

These three drawings are allied with two of mine, *Set III* and *Search III*, that acknowledge the grid as the trellis of modernity and the body as a zone of becoming – less in a diagnostic and diagrammatical fashion and more in the sense of an emanation. For me, the urgency is to re-assert ‘being’ against the grid of modernism that was carried by the formal trap of minimalism (the art of my upbringing) and also in the more recent digitalisation and urbanisation of our lives. If we allow ourselves a conception of being dispersed within, and extended by, spacetime, then a different set of perceptual criteria come into play. I believe the body is a porous and variable envelope in which there is no final bound condition.

You could say, in these specific drawings, Beuys uses line and I use light to identify the site of being. We are both trying to register life. I have tried to use the fugitive effects of carbon dispersed in casein and water to suggest our immersion in the troposphere. Space is not something that separates our bodies as objects from other objects (and bodies). Instead, it is the thing that extends and allows the body to be in a continuum – floating in a sea of air that connects us with all phenomena. It is as if, as we enter the borderland of our extinction, we are realising our immersion in all the varied forms of distributed intelligence.

These five drawings – three of Beuys’s and two of mine – his from the beginning of his trajectory as an artist and mine rather from the end – is where we are closest.

I chose the other drawings of mine presented in the exhibition more for contrast than consilience, but all are chosen for relevance.

Drawing is a form of physical thinking, both a mediumistic relationship with the material of its making and an alchemical mixture of deductive and intuitive reasoning.

A day without drawing is a day lost.

— Antony Gormley, 2022

About the artists

Antony Gormley

Antony Gormley is widely acclaimed for his sculptures, installations and public artworks that investigate the relationship of the human body to space. Since the 1960s, his work has developed the potential of sculpture through a critical engagement with both his own body and those of others to confront fundamental questions about the relationship of humans to nature and the cosmos. Gormley identifies the space of art as a place of becoming in which new behaviours, thoughts and feelings can arise. Gormley's work has been widely exhibited throughout the UK and internationally with exhibitions at venues including the Lehmbrock Museum, Duisburg (2022); Voorlinden Museum, Wassenaar (2022); M+, Hong Kong (2021); Royal Academy of Arts, London (2019); Delos, Greece (2019); Uffizi Gallery, Florence (2019); Philadelphia Museum of Art (2019); Long Museum, Shanghai (2017); Forte di Belvedere, Florence (2015); Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Switzerland (2014); Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Brasília (2012); Deichtorhallen, Hamburg (2012); The State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (2011); Kunsthaus Bregenz, Austria (2010); Hayward Gallery, London (2007); Malmö Konsthall, Sweden (1993); and Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark (1989). Permanent public works include the *Angel of the North* (Gateshead, UK); *Another Place* (Crosby Beach, UK); *Inside Australia* (Lake Ballard, Western Australia); *Exposure* (Lelystad, Netherlands); and *Chord* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, USA). Gormley was awarded the Turner Prize in 1994, the South Bank Prize for Visual Art in 1999, the Bernhard Heiliger Award for Sculpture in 2007, the Obayashi Prize in 2012 and the Praemium Imperiale in 2013. He was made an Officer of the British Empire (OBE) in 1997 and was knighted in the New Year's Honours list in 2014. He is an honorary fellow of the Royal Institute of British Architects, an honorary doctor of the University of Cambridge and a fellow of Trinity and Jesus Colleges, Cambridge. Gormley has been a Royal Academician since 2003.

Joseph Beuys

Joseph Beuys's extensive body of work is grounded in concepts of humanism, social philosophy and anthroposophy, which culminated in his 'extended definition of art'; the idea of life as a participatory 'social sculpture' or *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Beuys emerged as an artist in the midst of post-war German reconstruction. He understood art to be essential in the spiritual renewal of society and preservation of the environment, functioning in opposition to the materialistic and economic

propositions of the government. He saw art as an antidote to society's ills: a generative, healing force that could awaken individual creativity, activate political awareness and stimulate social change.

Beuys used a wide range of highly symbolic materials – such as felt, animal fat and honey – which were closely related to the shamanic aspects of his practice, including performances, lectures and educational Actions. His interest in the generation, storage and transmission of energy was the product of an extensive reflection on the forces of nature and his sustained commitment to environmental causes. Teaching was an essential element of his artistic practice and his anti-bureaucratic philosophical outlook prompted him to foster debates and acts of political activism to effect social change through democratic discussion. In 1972 and 1977, he brought politics into the traditional realm of art through his participation at documenta; he transformed his presentation spaces into arenas for public debate and discussion, addressing issues ranging from human rights to ecology.

Beuys was born in 1921 in Krefeld, Germany. In 1961 he was appointed professor of monumental sculpture at the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, where he was a charismatic figure that inspired an emerging generation of German artists. During this period, he became a member of the newly founded Fluxus movement, an international network of artists based in nearby Wuppertal. In the late 1960s, his activities became explicitly politicised. He founded the Free International University (FIU) for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research in 1973, the year after he established the Organisation for Direct Democracy through Referendum, and he later became involved with the German Green Party. His monumental retrospective at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York in 1979 established Beuys's international reputation.

Since the artist's death in 1986, his work has been shown in numerous museum exhibitions worldwide, including at the Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid; Centre Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf; Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin; and the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh. In 2021, a varied international programme of exhibitions, performances, lectures and events was held in major institutions to mark the centenary of the artist's birth.

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